“IT’S NOT ART; IT’S NOT THERAPY; IT’S SOMETHING ELSE”
An investigation into how aesthetic practice can be used in pedagogic situations for pupils to examine and reflect on themselves

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Abstract

In this investigation, I discuss how students can examine and reflect on themselves through aesthetic practice in various pedagogic situations. The field study took place over two months in the international settlement of Auroville in the south of India, where I visited schools and observed various pedagogical methods. In this study, I focus on two of these pedagogical methods: *Play of Painting* and *Awareness Through the Body*. In both, the body is considered an important part of the student’s learning and development. These experiences form the background for this investigation.

I investigated *Play of Painting* and *Awareness Through the Body* through focussing on one lesson from each method. I describe how the methods are organised and practised in Auroville schools with observations, visual material, and interviews from my field study.

In this investigation, I use a phenomenological and aesthetic perspective together with a brief introduction to the theory of Integral Education. I believe that aesthetics can be used in many different ways in a school context. In this thesis, I use the term aesthetic practices to understand and study *Awareness Through the Body* and *Play of Painting*. I see these methods as two examples of how aesthetic practices and conditions for aesthetic learning processes with different ways of reflection can be encouraged in an educational environment.

The children in *Play of Painting* and *Awareness Through the Body* learn about themselves through the experience of practising aesthetics with their whole bodies and senses. Through creating conditions for aesthetic practice as in *Awareness Through the Body* and *Play of Painting*, children can reflect on themselves together with others.

The purpose of this investigation is to research how aesthetic practices can be used in pedagogic situations through the methods *Play of Painting* and *Awareness Through the Body*. I focus on how pupils can examine and reflect on themselves through aesthetic practice in these two methods.

**Keywords:** Integral education, Aesthetic practice, Phenomenology of the body, Self-reflection, Painting, Awareness.
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1. Introduction

I consider myself an active person. Before the day even starts, I have a plan of what to do. Every moment is an opportunity to find something that needs to be done, and I multitask to keep up with my to-do list. I realized, however, that I need to consider what I mean by being active. I spend most of my day sitting still. Sit and study. Sit and think. Sit and plan. The only thing that is active during the day is my head, structuring the next day.

Somewhere in all of this, I stopped listening to my body. Instead of relating to what my body needed or wanted, I looked on the list for what to do next. Even though my body sent me signals—headache, stiff shoulders, and gastric catarrh—as a member of society that considers stress a normal part of everyday life, I failed to listen. Something has to change, not only with me but also in society generally.

The political focus in the Swedish school system is on the individual student being as productive and effective as possible. Sven-Eric Liedman refers in *Hets!* to this, describing how the focus is to strengthen Swedish market competitiveness, where a school’s results are more important than a student’s learning process.

Liedman questions this political focus and discusses different and new ways of organising education, in which the focus is not only based on economics but on the whole society and the individual student.1 With this political focus in the Swedish school system in mind, I aim to examine an environment based on different and, for me, new ideas about both society and education.

I carried out the field study of this investigation in Auroville, an international settlement in the south of India. I originally passed by this community while I was traveling in India three years ago. I found it an interesting environment and wanted to learn more about it. I was able to return with the support of a “Minor Field Studies” scholarship from SIDA.2

During my two months in Auroville, I visited schools and observed different pedagogical ideas. I focus in this investigation on two of the pedagogical methods used in Auroville schools, called Awareness Through the Body and Play of Painting. In Awareness Through the Body and Play of Painting, the body is considered an important part of the student’s learning and development. These experiences are the background for this investigation.

2 Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.
1.1 Background

Auroville is currently home to 2200 residents from 43 different countries. It is an ongoing project endorsed by UNESCO and the Government of India. The vision for this experimental community was conceived in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry by the philosopher Sri Aurobindo (b. Aurobindo Ghosh) together with his spiritual collaborator Mirra Alfassa (known simply as “the Mother”), who founded Auroville in 1968.

Auroville, as an experimental settlement, has won international acclaim for its efforts in social and environmental sustainability. It is a place for developing new individual and collective ways of living towards human unity. The idea of Auroville lives in a mutual spirit of self-awareness, which reflects the whole society. Auroville is not a ready-made concept; it is still in progress and an experiment, developing new ways to realize its vision.

The school system in Auroville is based on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s educational philosophy, called Integral education. The ideas were developed in the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, part of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Today, it provides education in many subjects, from Kindergarten to college levels of study.

The Centre of Education was created as a site of experiment and research in education, where mistakes are a part of the development that allows new and unexpected ideas. They believe in a unity of all knowledge, which should be practised in the education system. The Integral Education that is embraced in the Centre of Education is being continued in Auroville.

The schools in Auroville are structured in different ways. Auroville has twelve schools, located both inside of Auroville and in the surrounding Tamil villages. Some schools follow the state curriculum of India, while others are inspired by and combine different pedagogical ideas from the whole world. Even though they are organised and structured in different ways, they have the common aim of living Integral Education.

I investigate the theory of Integral Education and how it is practised through Awareness Through the Body and Play of Painting, pedagogical methods developed in Auroville as a way to practise Integral Education in any school system.

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3 Further images, Appendix 1. Images from different places in Auroville.
1.2 Aim of study

I believe that it is important to consider the political focus on the Swedish school system and discuss alternative ideas of society and education. As an becoming Art teacher, I am interested in how aesthetic practices can be used in different pedagogical situations. I believe that aesthetics can be practised in many ways in different subjects.

The purpose of this study is to research how aesthetic practices can be used in pedagogical situations through the methods Awareness Through the Body and Play of Painting, which are two examples with many interesting aspects. I focus on how pupils can examine and reflect on themselves through aesthetic practice in these two methods.

1.3 The question at issue

How are the pedagogical methods Awareness Through the Body and Play of Painting used and practised in Auroville schools?

How can aesthetic practice be used in pedagogical situations to allow pupils to examine and reflect on themselves?

1.4 Outline of study

I chose to do the field study of this investigation in Auroville to examine an environment based on different and, for me, new ideas about both education and society. While Auroville as a place for experimental research contains many interesting aspects in many different fields, I focussed on the pedagogical and artistic fields.

Auroville schools use various pedagogical methods and ideas. I focus here on Play of Paining and Awareness Through the Body since they are used in many Auroville schools, are not connected to one school with a particular philosophy or curriculum, and can therefore can be practised in any school system, using a teacher’s perspective based on my visual material, observations, and interviews.

Informants

The informants were teachers selected from different schools in Auroville. I chose seven informants that have been or are working in various ways in different Auroville schools to get a
broad perspective of the education environment there.

Because Auroville is an international settlement with people from the whole world, the informants were from different cultures. I have chosen not to reveal their cultural background because it is connected to their origins as well as to the different cultures in Auroville. They can therefore not represent one culture.

I have chosen not to disclose the informants’ gender, cultural background, or age in order to keep them anonymous; because Auroville is a small settlement, it would be easy to figure out their identities from this information. Instead, I have chosen to focus on their professions in Auroville, what they are working with, and the length of time they have been working there. All the names of the informants have been changed.

1.5 Empirical data

My empirical data consists of seven audio-recorded interviews, with particular focus on two of them. During my field study I wrote field notes from participant observations in Auroville schools and I have photographic and video documentation of various pedagogical situations and the educational environment of Auroville.

1.6 Methodology

I conducted an ethnographic investigation based on qualitative methods.9 I interviewed seven people who had been or were actively working in Auroville schools.10 I conducted participant observations in Auroville schools as well as in the surrounding Tamil villages.11

During my field study I gathered photo and video documentation to get an overview of my field. A part of this has been a video diary, where I recorded myself to document my process and show different places in and around Auroville, but I have not analysed this material as part of my empirical data.12

Interviews

I recorded the audio and wrote notes during the seven interviews. I phrased the interview question according to the subject’s profession and work experience in Auroville. All of the interviews were

10 Ibid., p. 79 ff.
11 Ibid., p. 66 ff.
transcribed from the sound recordings after topics from my notes. I divided all the transcribed interviews later into separate subjects by what they had in common. In this way, I was able to see many aspects of the same topics as well as what the subjects agreed and disagreed on.

I focussed on two interviews in my analysis, one with a teacher from Awareness Through the Body and one from Play of Painting. The other interviews include various aspects of the educational environment in Auroville and helped me during the investigation process to understand my subject.

**Visual documentation**

My visual materials comprise the main part of my documentation and helped me to get an overview of the subject. From all the videos and photos, I chose a variety to use in this thesis and in the visual abstract to show my subject and communicate my findings.

During the investigation, I used my visual documentation as a base, together with the interviews and theory, to analyse the pedagogical methods Awareness Through the Body and Play of Painting. I describe and discuss the methods mainly through two pictures, which I use as a visualization of two different learning situations from each method. Through looking at these pictures, I hope to be able to portray the content of the methods from how they arrange and perform them in Auroville schools.

**Visual abstract**

In my visual abstract, I focus on images and videos from my field study to show the scenery of Auroville, from both the visual documentation and the video diary. The visual material has been selected in order to keep the person in the video anonymous. I hope in this way to provide examples from Awareness Through the Body and Play of Painting and communicate my findings.

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13 The Visual abstract is part of the communication and examination of the examwork produced at the Dep. of Visual Arts Education.
2. Theory

I employ a phenomenological and aesthetic perspective together with a brief introduction to Integral Education to theoretically ground my investigation. I found that these theories have many aspects in common, like ideas and terms.

2.1 Phenomenology

The phenomenological perspective can be used both as a theory and a method. I use it in this investigation as a theory. The phenomenological perspective entails our own experiences and feelings of meaning researched through how we perceive the world in different contexts. In *Sammanflätningar – fenomenologi från Husserl till Merleau-Ponty*, Jan Bengtsson says that, instead of relying on our apprehensions and prejudices of the world, we should open up to different interpretations of it. Phenomenology thus opens us up to an ambiguous perspective where things can not simply be put in one category or opposed to each other. These perspectives cooperate and together help us understand them and the world.¹⁴

Bengtsson cites as examples two different philosophers of the phenomenological perspective, Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merlau-Pontys. Husserl, the founder of the phenomenological perspective, argues that our experiences should be understood through both our senses and intellect. We do not experience the world separately, with just our senses or our intellect; instead they create a complete experience. Through experiences, we understand the world and it becomes meaningful to us.¹⁵

Merlau-Pontys develops Husserl’s thoughts about experiences. He focusses on experience through the body. He sees the body as an intermediary between the individual and the collective, as a subjective interpretation of the world.¹⁶ According to Merlau-Pontys, the body has more than just a physical experience. Another part of our experiences is, for example, our emotions. He explains that the body and the soul can not be seen as two separate things. Instead, they interconnect and complete each other in our experiences.¹⁷

*Phenomenology of the body*

In this investigation, I focus on the Merleau-Pontys term *phenomenology of the body*, which points

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¹⁵ Ibid., p. 9 and 27 ff.
¹⁶ Ibid., p. 40 and 75.
¹⁷ Ibid., p. 9.
out the importance of the body in the phenomenological perspective. He writes in his book *Lovtal till filosofin* that it is through our body that we experience our world and ourselves.\(^\text{18}\) In this investigation, I use a holistic perspective of the body, in which our thoughts as well as our senses are valued.

An important part of the phenomenology of the body is *perception*. The term perception can be described as an impression of our senses as, for example, with the smell of a flower. This impression works as an unreflected experience that our body does without judgments.\(^\text{19}\) In a perception, we do not judge if the flower smells good or bad; it is the awareness of the smell that is important.

Merleau-Pontys points out that to be aware of this value experience of our body is as an important condition for knowledge because it is through perception that our awareness meets the world and together create meaning.\(^\text{20}\) In this thesis, I use this perspective on the body to describe the importance of our experiences through the body in a learning process.

### 2.2 Aesthetics—A perspective on learning

The term aesthetics can have many different meanings depending on its context. I use the term aesthetics in a school context based on a project called *Kultur i skolan*, which was commissioned by the Swedish government educational department and delegated to Malmö Högskola. The *Kultur i skolan* project was initiated to research and support aesthetic learning processes and cultural practices in an educational environment.\(^\text{21}\)

I focussed on two different reports produced during this project, called *Skolan och den radikala estetiken* and *Kultur och estetik i skolan* written by Jan Thavenius, Lena Aulin-Gråhamn, and Magnus Persson. In both of these reports, the term aesthetic used to describe a perspective on knowledge and how it could be used in school.

According to Jan Thavenius, aesthetics is a part of all knowledge and plays an important role in every aspect of school. He argues that school needs to be more influenced by the art perspective of knowledge, which opens us to uncertain and contradictory aspects, and encourages new questions

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\(^{19}\) Ibid., p. 21 and p. 45.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 21 and p 24.

\(^{21}\) Thavenius, Jan m.fl, (2003), *Skolan och den radikala estetiken*, Malmö: Malmö Högskola, Rapporter om utbildning no 1/2003, p. 4.
with or without a right or wrong answer. To put art and aesthetics together with learning opens us up to all sorts of different ways to experience and knowledge, where our words, thoughts, and senses are included.

Many meanings of aesthetics

Lena Aulin-Gråhamm and Jan Thavenius use in the Kultur och estetik i skolan report a broad perspective on aesthetics. To describe what aesthetics could mean in a school context, they divide it into four parts. First of all, aesthetics as knowledge of the senses points out the importance of using the whole body and all the senses in a learning process. It is through the senses our experiences can become knowledge that we can apply and use in new situations.

The second part, the reality seen through aesthetic expression and impression, is where we interpret aesthetic impressions like art and advertising and shape our own expressions through ourselves to understand the ambiguity of our reality.

The third part is the form constructive of meaning, where the forms and shape communicate meanings that help us understand and make sense of our environment. With this perspective everything is a form and has a form. For example how the classroom is organized is a form in school.

The fourth and last part, aesthetic as a social form, is where aesthetics creates an open and challenging educational environment that enables new and norm-critical questions. It is important in this environment to explore different expressions that develop the student’s ability to participate as citizens in a democracy.

All of these parts show the many aspects of aesthetics and how it could be useful in a school context to develop an aesthetic perspective of knowledge. In this investigation, I focus on the first part, but use all of them to see how aesthetics could be used in an educational environment.

The first part, aesthetics as knowledge of the senses, could be developed with Göran Sörbom’s perspective on the term aesthetics. He divides it in Uppslagsbok i Bildanalys – Teorier, Metoder, Begrepp into three terms: sensation, sensory experience, and sensory knowledge.

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22 Thavenius, Jan m.fl. (2004), Skolan och den radikala estetiken, Lund: Studentlitteratur, p. 10 f.
23 Ibid., p 230.
A sensation is the impression of our senses, similar to the term perception in the phenomenological perspective. In a sensory experience, the sensation becomes an experience, something that we experienced in relation to a certain situation. In sensory knowledge, our experiences of the sensation become knowledge, something that we can apply and use in different situations. This could be used to understand how we learn with the body through our senses, which gives us experiences to develop into knowledge.

**Aesthetic learning processes and aesthetic practice**

These different aspects of aesthetics could be used to understand the connection between aesthetics and learning. Aulin-Gråhamn and Thavenius write about aesthetic learning processes in the *Kultur och estetik i skolan*. An aesthetic learning process is not a special kind of learning. It is the aesthetic perspective on knowledge applied to all kinds of learning processes. This includes all the different aspects of aesthetics. An aesthetic learning process considers personal, social, and historical aspects where our intellect, feeling, and senses are brought together.

In showing how this aesthetic perspective could be used in school, Aulin-Gråhamn and Thavenius use the term aesthetic practice. This term can have many different meaning, connected to both the student’s own learning and the culture of the school. In this investigation, I use the term as a way to understand how aesthetics can take form in a learning situation. With the term practice, I refer both to practicing with our body and senses as well as reflection through thoughts and discussions.

**Aesthetic reflection**

In *Educating the reflective practitioner*, Donald A. Schön, professor in philosophy, discusses how we can reflect in different ways. He says that we can reflect on our actions, observe, and discuss what we have been doing. This is a common way to use reflection in a learning situation, when the students analyse what they have been doing after they have done it.

Schön uses the term reflection-in-action to describe how we reflect while doing something,

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27 Ibid., p 159.
28 Ibid., p.156.
without interrupting it. Then the reflection is present in action; we act and reflect at the same time. This kind of reflection is often not verbal. Instead, we experience and become aware of it with our body.

For example, when we learn to ride a bicycle, it is hard to think about how you are supposed to peddle, hold the balance, and steer all at the same time. But when we jump on the bicycle, we understand and reflect while doing it. The knowing of how to ride a bicycle comes through the experience of doing it.

This can also be described by the term *knowing-in-action*. For example when we catch a ball, if we think and concentrate on how we are supposed to catch the ball, we will likely miss it. You cannot know before the ball is coming how you are supposed to catch it; you have to act when it comes. If, instead of thinking about it, you let the body go on the instinct of where the ball is going, your arm will most likely spontaneously catch the ball.

Schön describes this as the knowledge *in* the action, which becomes knowledge of experience. If you have caught the ball many times before, you know by experience to trust to spontaneously act without thinking about it.29 In my understanding, this kind of reflection can be understood as aesthetic reflection, such that, instead of thinking and verbally reflecting after an experience, we reflect through the body with our senses during the experience. A reflection can thus take form in all different ways. In this thesis, I focus on reflection through the body with our senses.

As I described, aesthetics with its different aspects can be used in many ways in a school context. In this thesis, I use the term aesthetics to understand and study Awareness Through the Body and Play of Painting. I see these methods as examples of how aesthetic practices and conditions for aesthetic learning processes with different ways of reflection can be encouraged in an educational environment.

2.3 Integral Education

Integral Education is based on the vision of a new theory of education by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Because Integral Education is rather comprehensive, I have only been able to touch upon the surface in this investigation. I therefore introduced only the part of Integral Education that I see as relevant with the practice in Auroville schools and agree with the phenomenological and

aesthetic perspective.

Integral Education is practised as a school system in the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. The Centre of Education has its own official journal, which contains the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, which forms the basis of their educational philosophy. They believe in a unity of all knowledge, which should be practised in the education system.  

The Centre of Education is based on something called free progress, which encourages students to make their own choices in their learning process with the guidance of a teacher. They can for example create their own timetable and make their own choices about specializations in different subjects. Free progress can only be consulted with integrally and harmoniously of the student’s own choice. The Centre of Education believes that free progress is an individual process and awards therefore no degrees or diplomas.

An important part of Integral Education is the student’s own self-development. It is important in an educational environment to inspire children to develop their personality together with their learning. This is divided in Integral Education into the five essential aspect of personality: the physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic, and the spiritual.

These terms are further described by Sraddhalu Ranade, scientist, educator, and scholar at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Introduction to Integral Education – An Inspirational Guide. Ranade explains the physical part as our body, the foundation and base of our learning. The vital is about our emotions and the mental about our mind. The psychic is the connection to our self and the spiritual to our soul.

All of these parts play an important role in child development and need to be encouraged to integrate with each other during the learning process. When all the parts in the learning process are stimulated, the students are able to concentrate and develop their awareness of themselves and their surrounding environment.

The practices of Integral Education developed by the Centre of Education are continued in

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Auroville schools. The pedagogic methods Awareness Through the Body and Play of Painting are two examples of this, and I focus on these instead of the Centre of Education because they are two methods demonstrating that Integral Education can be used in any school system. I describe how Integral Education is practised in the methods during my investigation.

2.4 Previous research

**Body and mind in interaction**

Anna Carlsson, formerly at the Social and Behavioral Science department at Mälardalens Högskola, writes in her thesis *Body and Mind in Interaction – A Study of the Impact of Motion on Children's Learning* about how everything in the body collaborates. She says that the body and the mind complete each other during the learning process.\(^{34}\) Carlsson uses Eric Jensens’ research on the importance of subjects like art, music, and movement in school as an example of pedagogical ways to involve the whole body in learning.\(^{35}\)

Carlsson points out in her end discussion of the study that moving the body affects children's concentration. According to Carlsson both the body and the mind must be satisfied for the children to learn well. To continuously work with movement and make it a part of everyday life in school for children of all ages would not only be good for their health but also help them concentrate.\(^{36}\)

**Life skills training**

Anneli Bouvin, formerly at the Department of didactic and pedagogical work at Stockholm University, writes in her report *Life Skills Training - Discipline or Care?* about how *Life skills training* is used in school. The basics of this training are divided in five parts: self-knowledge, empathy, responsibility, communication, and conflict management. The children are supposed to develop their ability to understand, control, and take care of themselves, both from an individual and collective perspective.

Bouvin uses the term *emotional intelligence* to describe one part of Life skills training in which you learn about emotions and how to handle them. In this way, children can understand their own and others’ emotions better and develop their compassion. Through Life skills training, children get to know their and others’ behaviors, which also affects their social ability.\(^{37}\)

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\(^{35}\) Ibid., p. 8 f.

\(^{36}\) Ibid., p. 20.

3. Investigation

I investigated the pedagogical methods Awareness Through the Body and Play of Painting by focussing on one lesson from each method. I describe how the methods are organised and practised through observations, visual materials, and interviews from my field study. I use as a theoretical base a phenomenological and aesthetic perspective together with the theory of Integral Education to analyse the methods.

3.1. ATB - Awareness Through the Body

Awareness Through the Body, also called ATB, is a pedagogical method developed in Auroville in since 1992. The method was developed by Joan Sala, a natural and physical therapist, and Aloka Marti, a teacher in contemporary dance and yoga. In Awareness Through the Body: A Way to Enhance Concentration, Relaxation and Self-Knowledge for Children and Adults, Sala and Marti describe the method as a way for children to learn about themselves with their whole body.

The method is based on a comprehensive curriculum with different activities and exercises. These activities are designed for the participants to gradually develop and to encourage concentration, focus, and relaxation. All the activities are organised in various ways, focussing on one part of the body at a time. But all of them are developed for the participants to experience and to become aware of themselves through the whole body, using all their senses.

Nico, an ATB teacher in Auroville for three years, says that “ATB is not only of the body, it’s through the body”. ATB focusses not only on development and awareness of the physical body but also supports the vital, mental, psychic, and the spiritual part of the person. This is an example of how ATB is practising Integral Education. The ATB teachers use stories or games during activities that consider the different parts of the person through the experience of the whole body.

One example of a story being used during an ATB lesson was when the children performed a journey to the moon. Before they flew to the moon, they all got dressed together in an imaginary spacesuit. Then a spaceship in the form of a big tunnel led them into a room, which was the moon. In the room, they were supposed to climb, jump, and crawl to pass different obstacles. But because they were on the moon and wore heavy spacesuits they could not jump or run as they used to. They had to move slowly and consciously.

Through using the experience of going to the moon and wearing a spacesuit, the children became aware of their bodies and controlled its movements. But to be able to do that, they had to imagine the moon, feeling the gravity and the weight of the spacesuit with the whole body. In this way, the concept of an ATB lesson can be organised using a story or a game.

Today, the method is used in many Auroville schools with children from all grades. There are special ATB teachers educated in Auroville by the founders Sala and Marti, who guide classes in different schools Auroville. The method can be practised with adults and children, though my investigations in a school situation include only children as participants.

I focus on one ATB lesson as an example of how the method is practised in one of Auroville

40 Interview with Nico, 2012-02-12, Auroville, India, Appendix 2. Images from the ATB lesson on the moon.
42 Interview with Nico, 2012-02-12, Auroville, India.
schools. In the lesson that I observed and describe in this thesis, the ATB teachers used different activities focussing on breathing with children from kindergarten. The classes are often divided in two parts with about 12 children in each group. The children have ATB one time per week for about one hour. ATB is not a part of their physical education; Besides ATB, the children have physical education with different kinds of sports in their curriculum.

**ATB activities on breathing**

The children come to the classroom. They sit down on the floor in a circle together with the teacher. Each child gets a flower and the teacher asks the children to smell the flower. All of the children smell the flower and the teacher lights a candle in the middle of the circle. The teacher shows how to first smell the flower, breath in, and then blow out the candle. Then they do it together. The children have to take in a deep breath with the flower to be able to blow out the candle.

The teacher collects the flowers and puts the candle away. At the same time the teacher puts two bags of wooden blocks in the middle of the circle and tells the children to build small football fields. The teacher demonstrates this. The children form groups of two and two and start building. When the children are done, the teacher gives a Ping-Pong ball to each pair and explains that the children shall play football using their mouth. They are supposed to score the ball in the opposite goal through using nothing else but blowing the ball. The children are laying down on their knees and take turns blowing the ball to get it in the right direction. In the beginning, some children might use a hand in between to push the ball, but soon get into the game and takes deep breaths to move the ball. At halftime, the teacher stops the game and asks the children to switch partners. The game continues.

Nico explains that the teacher in ATB doesn’t ask the children to perform a competition. Even though they keep score during a game, the result is not the important part. He says that it is the content and process of the game that matters. In this case, the children use and become aware of their breathing. By making a game out of it, the children breathe deeply in and out without even thinking of it.

This can be described with Schöns’s term *reflection-in-action*. While the children play, they reflect with their body and senses on how they, for example, get the ball going in the right direction. They

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43 Further images, Appendix 3. Images of the School where the children in this example learn through ATB.
44 Interview with Nico, 2012-02-12, Auroville, India.
have to breathe hard and soft depending on where the ball is on the field. Even though they are only supposed to move the ball with their breath, they are still active with their bodies. They crawl, for example, around the field to get the best position for blowing the ball. In this way, their whole body is active and reflects, while playing without interrupting the game. Through these experiences the reflection-in-action turns into knowing-in-action and the children learn how to use their body in order to move the ball with their breath while performing.\(^{45}\)

When the game is finished, everybody collects the wooden blocks and the teacher asks the children to lay down separately for relaxation on the floor. They lie on their backs and close their eyes. The teacher takes the flowers again and starts to go around in the room and puts a flower under each child’s nose. When the children sense the smell of the flower, they can take it and quietly leave the classroom. This is the end of the breathing activity.

In this way, the children are using and exercising their perception, which I found relates to the phenomenological perspective, where the activities are organised after the impression of the children’s senses. For example, the children can rise when they smell the flower. It is the awareness and the experience of the smell that leads them through the activities.\(^{46}\)

During the whole lesson, the children used their breathing in different ways, both being active in the game and relaxing using their senses. The focus has not been on breathing in and out, but on moving a ball or smelling a flower. Through doing that, the children have exercised their breathing and become aware of their breath in different ways.

ATB can also be understood through the three terms—sensation, sensory experience, and sensory knowledge—into which Sörbom divides aesthetics where children use their senses to get impressions of how it feels. These impressions become experiences of their senses that they can apply during the activities. This way the children are learning to use their body with all their senses.\(^{47}\)

I had not previously experienced this way of using the body and our senses in a school situation. The subject in the Swedish school that is most similar to ATB is physical education. In my experience of physical education, the focus is mainly on the physical body, to train a healthy body. ATB does have this in common with physical education. But in ATB, a healthy body is not only

\(^{45}\) Schön (1990), p. 25 f.


considered physical muscles but also other things like breathing and relaxation. In this way, the children do not exercise only their physical body, but also explore themselves through their body and senses.

**Learn about yourself with others**

The goal of ATB is to learn about and get to know yourself. Sala and Marti write that children can experience different aspects of themselves through the activities in ATB, which they can apply in different situations\(^{48}\), such as, for example, knowing how to calm down if they feel angry or stressed. Nico says that children need to get to know themselves as well as others. The individual and the collective can not be separated from each other because we are always connected to both at the same time. That is why cooperation exercise is an important part of ATB activities. As a teacher, you need to guide one by one, and all together at the same time, he says.\(^{49}\)

Sala and Marti explain that the dialogue between the children and the teacher is an important part of ATB where both the children and the teacher learn from each other and with each other during activities.\(^{50}\) Nico describes this dialog as a way to talk to children when he teaches. He says that instead of telling the children, he guides them through questions. For example, when he observes that a child loses his or her concentration, he doesn’t tell the children to focus. He ask instead, “Did you realise that your focus went away?”. He describes it as a way of asking and what to ask for.\(^{51}\)

In this way, the children’s attentions are guided through their own experiences by realising or feeling that their focus went away in their own body. This way the children become aware through their own experience during the activities. This also creates a way for the children to have a dialogue with themselves during their process.\(^{52}\)

The work of ATB is a constant process with yourself. Nico explains it like a muscle that you need to train to keep active. It can also be understood, with Aulin-Grähamn and Thavenius’ terms, as an aesthetic learning process about yourself, in which the body and senses are used to get to know yourself and others.\(^{53}\) As Merleau-Ponty writes in his discussion of the phenomenological perspective of the body, we experience our world and ourselves through our bodies.\(^{54}\)


\(^{49}\) Interview with Nico, 2012-02-12, Auroville, India.

\(^{50}\) Sala & Marti (2006), p. 28.

\(^{51}\) Interview with Nico, 2012-02-12, Auroville, India.

\(^{52}\) Sala & Marti (2006), p. 28.

\(^{53}\) Thavenius & Aulin-Grähamn (2003), no 9/2003, p. 159

\(^{54}\) Merleau-Ponty (2004), p. 10
3.2 Play of Painting

Play of Painting is based on educator Arno Stern’s method of creative painting and expression semiology.\textsuperscript{55} Play of Painting is inspired by the work of Arno Stern and developed through his work all around the world. It has been practised in Auroville together with Integral Education since 2003, and is today used in many Auroville schools. Play of Painting is organised similarly to Stern’s method, but, depending on the school’s circumstances, small differences can be apparent, for example, in the division of groups.

I mainly have used experiences and discussions with teachers from my field study in Auroville to investigate Play of Painting. But I refer also to some parts of Stern’s method. Stern is mainly focussing on a universal phenomenon based on different signs connected to expression semiology called \textit{formulation}, which appeared during his research with this method.\textsuperscript{56} I focus in this investigation on the creative painting part of the method, connecting to the participant’s self-discovery.

The terms that I use during this investigation are based on the practice of Play of Painting in Auroville schools and can be different from Stern’s method. For example, I call the teachers “practitioners” and the children “participants” because, in this investigation, Play of Painting is practised in a school context. Usually Play of Painting is practised with participants of all ages.57

I focussed on one single lesson of Play of Painting to describe how the method is practised in one of the schools in Auroville. The children practise Play of Painting one time per week for about one hour. The groups are mixed in age with 8-12 children from kindergarten up to sixth grade. The Play of Painting is separated from the art subject in school; the children have other art related lessons like sculpture, music, or drama in their curriculum.58

The Play of Painting space

How the space is organised is an important part of Play of Painting. Auroville has a specially designed house for Play of Painting, which is being used by one of the schools and other groups of citizens and guest of Auroville.59 The other schools each have one special room for Play of Painting in their building that they arrange in a similar way.

The room was designed with plain white walls and the colours are placed in the middle of the room on a table called a “table-palette”. The children paint standing separately around the room. Stern explains that the room is designed to minimize influences and distractions for the children while painting.60 Pascal, an art teacher in Auroville for more than 15 years, explains that the room needs to be well prepared, for example, with clean colours, brushes, and water on the table-palette, so the participants can start painting right away when they arrive. Pascal explains that she needs to “put the condition where it can be open” for the participants to paint.61

The first time I visited Play of Painting, I was surprised. This way of organising a room for painting was not what I had been used to. In Swedish schools, painting is usually a part of the art subject. The art room is often organised with chairs and tables and a whiteboard in the front for the teacher to demonstrate certain things. The students sit by the tables on chairs, either facing the teacher in the front or the other classmates in small groups. If they paint, they either sit by the table or

58 Interview with Pascal, 2012-03-03, Auroville, India.
59 Further images, Appendix 2. Images of the Play and Painting room and lesson.
61 Interview with Pascal, 2012-03-03, Auroville, India.
sometimes use an easel that had been standing by the wall, put up wherever there is space left in the room. Usually the students have their own palettes in their hands while sitting or standing still and painting.

In the room for Play of Painting, there are neither chairs nor tables, aside from the table-palette in the middle. All the children stand and paint, facing the wall with their papers or seeing their classmates while going to the table-palette for more or another colour. The room is already prepared for the children to start painting. They do not need to rearrange or listen to the teacher talk before they start. The attention is never focussed on the teacher. It belongs to the children. The room is organised for the children to focus on their own painting in a shared space together with others.

I believe that the way Play of Painting is organised relates to the phenomenological perspective of the body. Through organising the room for the children to stand and paint instead of sitting still, the body is considered an important part of Play of Painting. The children’s walking to get another colour gets their bodies active during the painting process.

As Merleau-Pontys points out, we experience not only with our mind but also with the whole body.62 In Play of Painting, not only the mind is active, but also the body. The children paint through their whole body. This is represented not only through the organisation of the room, but also during a Play of Painting lesson.

**A Play of Painting lesson**

The children start a Play of Painting lesson by taking a piece of paper and choosing a spot on the wall where they want to stand and paint. Usually the children start with one A3-sized paper but they can continue with more if they want during the lesson. The children choose whether to have the paper horizontal or vertical. Then the teacher helps them put the paper up on the wall with pins in the upper corners and the children put the pins in the lower ones.

How the paper is placed on the wall is important. It is supposed to be set at a proper height for each child. The teacher places the paper so the children's eyes are in the middle of the paper when they stand by the wall. Even the pencil is supposed to be held in a certain way, so it lays well in their hands. The children are supposed to stand with good posture with their whole body while painting.

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The body is considered as important for Play of Painting as the organisation of the process of painting is. The body is not only supposed to be active in the process but also needs a firm stand for each child’s posture.

After the children start painting they choose from the table-palette which colour they want to start with. Each colour on the table is equipped with three brushes, one big and two smaller ones, so more than one child can use the same colour at the same time. There is also a cup of water to use for each colour. The colours are not supposed to be mixed with each other, even though everybody is sharing the table-palette, because the colours need to be clean for the next user. When a child has used one colour, he or she puts the brush back without washing it to sustain the colour and the next one can continue using it.

If the children want to mix colours while painting, they dip one finger in each chosen colour and mix them with their fingers, to get the colour they want. When they find the right combination, they show it on their finger to the teacher, who helps them mix it in a separate cup with a separate brush.

An important part of the Play of Painting is concentration. The children are shown how to dip the brush carefully in the water and to take little colour on their brush before starting to paint. If they spill colour on the floor while going in between their paper and the table-palette, there is a cleaning cloth for each child. This way, the children become aware of what they are doing and take good care to sustain the colours and the working area for everyone’s comfort. This helps them both to be patient with each other and to take responsibility for their own bodies and actions.

Pascal explains that sometimes before a lesson, she reserves a moment of meditation together with the children to help them concentrate. If the children, for example, come right away from another lesson, they still have those thoughts in their mind and have a hard time focussing on what comes next. Then she sits or lies down with them for a few minutes to catch their breath and relax. She says “it makes them focus and open”, which helps them concentrate on their painting during the lesson.63

The Play of Painting lesson is based on collaboration between the teachers and the children. The teachers work more like guides and helpers for the children. I refer to them here as teachers, even

63 Interview with Pascal, 2012-03-03, Auroville, India.
though they do not teach specific facts during a Play of Painting lesson. For example, they do not teach perspective or different technique of painting that often is a part of a painting lesson in a traditional art class in school. Pascal describe her task as a teacher like this:

> It’s not that I have something ready that I … tell to the children and then they have to do it. It is not that I have a ready product that they have to learn. But I try to be open to their need of the moment and to respond to that need.\(^{64}\)

To be able to do that, the teachers must know and feel the children, what they need and when, she explains. For example, they must prepare and help the children with practical things, like mixing colours or when they are done with a paper, so the children can concentrate on their painting. This is for Pascal an important part of the collaboration between the teacher and children during Play of Painting.\(^{65}\)

**Painting for free expression and self-reflection**

The children choose what they want to paint. Neither the children nor the teachers are supposed to talk about what they are painting. This doesn't make the classroom quite; the children and teachers talk with each other, but not about the creation or the content of the paintings.

Pascal explains that no talking about the paintings is an important part of the Play of Painting. She says that if the teachers use words like *nice* or *beautiful*, it will affect the child's painting. There is no right or wrong in what the children are painting, for example the child can paint a dog bigger than a house if they want. Pascal explains that the teacher’s role is not to judge or correct the children's paintings, only to respect their expression and facilitate their process.

When the children feel done with their painting they tell the teacher, who helps them put the paper away. The teacher lets the painting dry and writes the child’s name on the backside of the paper. When the paper is dry, they store it with the child's earlier paintings. The child takes a new paper and keeps on painting. Each painting is a part of a process. The process of painting is more important than the result. The children's own painting process doesn't have an end result.

This is one example of how Integral Education is practised in Play of Painting and can be compared to how the Centre of Education works with free progress. The children decide their own painting process. They choose what they want to paint and when they feel done and want to

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\(^{64}\) Interview with Pascal, 2012-03-03, Auroville, India.

\(^{65}\) Ibid.,
continue on a new paper. The process of painting is therefore free to progress according to the children own choice.\(^{66}\)

I have never experienced this way of using painting before. In the Swedish school system, a verbal refection of the painted result is common. The paintings are often watched and analysed. The children get to explain what they have painted and why. The teachers reply often with the word “nice” and the painting are put up in the classroom or stored with their earlier work.

The reflection in Play of Painting is not spoken. The experience of painting includes for the children a reflection in their body. This could be understood with Schöns term \textit{reflection-in-action}.\(^{67}\) The children can instead reflect while they are painting. They don’t stop and reflect, they paint and reflect at the same time. For example, every time they take a new color. The children reflect with their senses through their whole body during the painting process.

Stern explains that the paintings are not supposed to be regarded by others as works of art or meant to send a message.\(^{68}\) The paintings used in this method are rather a tool for self expression. According to, the paintings are considered a part of the children's reflection on themselves without competition. He says that it “allows the individuals to fulfill themselves among others rather than against them.”\(^{69}\)

Pascal says that through creating circumstances for free expression the children can, in all ages from all backgrounds, discover themselves without judgments. Play of Painting can help the children find what they are interested in. She says. “/…/ the things that interest them the most will appear in the painting”.\(^{70}\)

During my observations and participations in Play of Painting, I experienced what Pascal was talking about. The first time I tried Play of Painting myself, it was hard for me to start painting, even choosing the first color. I tried to figure out what I was supposed to paint. What it should represent and look like. I was very aware of what I was painting, so the result would look good and represent me as an artist.

This feeling surprised me, because the children’s actions looked so easy. I experienced that they

\(^{66}\) Sri Aurobindo Ashram website, \url{http://www.sriaurobindoashram.org/ashram/saice/courses.php}, (2012-08-15), Interview with Pascal, 2012-03-03, Auroville, India.

\(^{67}\) Schön (1990), p. 25 f.

\(^{68}\) Arno Stern Website, \url{http://arnostern.com/en/en_closlieu.htm} (2012-06-06)


\(^{70}\) Interview with Pascal, 2012-03-03, Auroville, India.
started painting right away without any limits. But during my own third lesson, something changed. I switched from light to dark colours and stopped thinking of what I was doing. My feelings and painting changed completely. I realized that it didn't matter what I was painting; that wasn't the purpose of it. I chose colours reflecting what I felt while painting instead of considering what would match the end result.

This experience did align with my observations of the children's painting. Pascal explained that the work of Play of Painting is an unending process, where you are able to work with yourself through free expression and help children as adults to reflect about themselves.  

4. Conclusions

In the conclusions, I show the results of the investigation in relation to the investigation purpose and the questions of issue. I discuss two examples of how aesthetic practice can be used in a pedagogic situation, through ATB and Play of Painting, allowing students to examine and reflect on themselves. During the investigation, I found several aspects that ATB and Play of Painting have in common, both in the content and how they are practised. I show and discuss these aspects during the conclusions.

4.1 A subject about yourself

In Play of Painting and ATB, the children are examining themselves in different ways, either through free expression with painting where they can find out what they are interested in, as in Play of Painting, or getting to know themselves and their bodies through different activities as in ATB. Pascal explains that the methods “create the condition for the children that they can discover their own way of being”. Through creating these conditions, the children can, without judgment, discover themselves together with others. Pascal compares it to a flower: if given the right amount of compost, water, and sun, it will grow. The methods “create conditions where they can blossom”, she says.

Awareness Through the Body and Play of Painting can be understood as two methods where, in different ways, you get to know and learn about yourself. I see them as two methods that can be a part of a subject in school, where you get to learn about yourself. This can be compared to the Life skills training subject in the Swedish school, that I described with Bouvin’s report in previous

71 Ibid.,
72 Interview with Pascal, 2012-03-03, Auroville, India.
research.

The Life skills training subject focusses on a general perspective of life. ATB and Play of Painting focus instead on a subject and personal perspective. This subject could be seen as a way for students in all grades to work with themselves as a part of their education.

I note that this subject about one’s self has no short-term aim, as in ATB and Play of Painting, where the work is a part of an unending process. Therefore no grades are given, just as in Life skills training and the Centre of Education. The process in Play of Painting and ATB is an individual development from a subjective perspective, which cannot be evaluated. Instead, it is aimed at development for the whole life.

Pascal explains that getting to know and be aware of certain things about yourself can help you develop and get to know your passion and abilities. “You will know what to do for your development”, she says. For example, you can find your interests in Play of Painting or know your body so you can control your concentration and attention for relaxation as in ATB. As an example of this, Nico says, “developing concentration and attention is a tool for any task in life”. The work of ATB and Play of Painting can help children find tools to use in various situations throughout life. That is why a subject about yourself, with methods like ATB and Play of Painting, can be an important part of school.

4.2 Through aesthetic practice

The children get to know and learn about themselves using their bodies in ATB as well as in Play of Painting. In ATB, the body is the center of the method, where they not only learn with their body but also through and about it. In Play of Painting, the body is active while painting, for example, or walking to get more colour or standing and painting.

Both methods can be described with Aulin-Gråhamn and Thavenius term aesthetic practice, where by using the whole body and all senses the methods practise aesthetics. I refer mainly to the first explanation of aesthetics, as knowledge of the senses, that Aulin-Gråhamn and Thavenius describe. Both the methods work also with aesthetic impression, through our senses, and expression, through painting and using the body in different ways.

73 Bouvin, Anneli (2008), Life skills training - discipline or care?, Stockholm: Stockholm University, p. 10 f.
74 Interview with Pascal, 2012-03-03, Auroville, India.
75 Interview with Nico, 2012-02-12, Auroville, India.
Through creating conditions for aesthetic practice with their bodies the children can examine and reflect on themselves as I have mentioned earlier. This can be related to the fourth description of aesthetics, aesthetics as a social form. Aulin-Gråhamn and Thavenius explain that exploring aesthetic expressions in different ways affect the student’s ability to participate as citizens in a democracy. In this way, the work of Play of Painting and ATB is important, not only for each person but also for the society.76

Even though the methods work with aesthetics and self-reflection, Pascal argues, “it’s not art; it’s not therapy; it’s something else”.77 I believe that ATB and Play of Painting can be two examples of this something else, where the children examine and reflect on themselves through aesthetic practice.

5. Reflections and further questions

I have somehow during this investigation changed. It is like I feel myself better. I breath more deeply and my posture has improved. I keep my whole body active. I don’t want to do three things at once or spend the days sitting still. Instead, I take time in between to stop and feel what I want to do. It is like I can hear my body again.

These changes have not only affected me as a person but also as a pedagogue. It has helped me to realize the importance of being connected to yourself and using the whole body in everything you do. I think that learning how to take care of yourself is very important, especially in a society where stress can be a common part of everyday life. To learn, for example, how to relax and calm down in a stressful situation or to be able to control your body and know how to concentrate are important parts for every person’s well being.

To continue this research, I would like to examine: How can methods like Play of Painting and Awareness Through the Body be practised in a Swedish school system? A similar subject like Life skills training is already a part of the Swedish school system where a more general perspective of life is being introduced. But working with methods like Play of Painting and Awareness Through the Body, I believe, can help maintain a connection to yourself and the body.

In Play of Painting and Awareness through the body the development of children is supported through aesthetic practice. Children get to examine, reflect, and express themselves using their

77 Interview with Pascal, 2012-03-03, Auroville, India.
whole bodies. Through their own experience they gain a self-understanding that may help them in many different situations in their lives. I believe encouraging methods like Play of Painting and Awareness Through the Body is good, not only for the sake of each person but also for the whole society.
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Appendix 1.

Images from different places in Auroville
Appendix 2.

Images of the Play and Painting building
Appendix 3.

Images from the ATB lesson on the moon

Images from the School where the children in this example learn through ATB