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Published online: 18 Jun 2009.

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The art of teaching children the arts: music, dance and poetry with children aged 2–8 years old

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In this article, the theoretical framework of developmental pedagogy is presented as a tool in studying and developing children's knowing within the arts. The domains of art focused on are music, poetry and dance/aesthetic movement. Through empirical examples from a large-scale research project, we illustrate the tools of developmental pedagogy and show how this perspective contributes to our understanding of children's learning of music, dance and poetry. More specifically, we will analyse: (a) the important role of the teacher in children's learning within the arts; (b) the importance of conversing when learning the arts; (c) what constitutes the knowledge, what we refer to as 'learning objects', to be appropriated within the three domains of art focused on; and (d) how to conceive of progression in children's knowing within the arts.

Keywords: aesthetics; arts; developmental pedagogy; early schooling; learning

Introduction

The aesthetic subjects have always had a place in education for children in the early years. Teaching and learning for children in preschool, kindergarten and primary school have relied upon the creative subjects in making children aware of the world around them and of their own creative and artistic competences – even though emergent reading, writing and mathematics have lately been seen as more important. With a background in the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, in the romantic pedagogical movement starting with Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel, the aesthetic was found to be just as important as logic and ethics as a base for learning. Although the concept of the aesthetic has now changed from sensory experience to knowledge about beauty, sublimity and art, the aesthetic subjects as we know them found their way into the very first attempts to establish formal education for children in the pre- and primary school age. Song, music, painting, modelling, rhyme, verse, play and dance were as much part of the everyday routine as prayer, kitchen tasks and storytelling.

Previous research has taken much for granted when dealing with the arts and children's learning of the aesthetic subjects. In our research group we have asked ourselves what we expect children in the early years to learn from the arts and of the arts as contents of learning. The purpose of this article is threefold: (1) To argue for the relevance of the theoretical framework of developmental pedagogy (Pramling

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Samuelsson and Asplund Carlsson 2007, 2008) when studying children's learning in the domains of music, dance and poetry; (2) To illustrate, through empirical examples, what this perspective contributes to our understanding of the learning of the arts (music, dance and poetry) in children's early schooling (preschool and the first years of primary school); (3) To explicate so-called learning objects in early music, dance and poetry learning (i.e., clarify what knowledge these three domains of art consist of).

There are several reasons for focusing on these particular art-forms. One reason is that while there is considerable research literature on children and visual art and music, this is not the case with young children's learning of poetry and dance. Research on children and music tends to focus either on the practices of musical experts or on schools with specialist music profiles. In contrast, we have studied children's music learning in ordinary, public, preschools and schools, since this is where most children encounter the pedagogy of these domains, that is, in pedagogical practices that are not specialised in these art-forms. This is an important difference between our research and much of the current research on children and music. Another strand of research on children and music looks at leisure-time activities involving music. This is also fundamentally different from our pedagogical interest in children's learning in preschool and school. By 'pedagogy' we mean the practice through which someone is helped to learn something. The concept of 'developmental pedagogy' refers to the particular approach for developing children's skills and knowledge in Early Childhood Education (ECE) as described below.

This article is structured in the following way. Firstly, we will review the research literature on children and music, poetry and dance. This review will clarify how our theoretical perspective differs from that of the majority of previous research in the field. Secondly, the theoretical framework of developmental pedagogy will be presented. We will clarify and exemplify those tools that are useful to analysts in the study of children's learning and to teachers in facilitating children's learning. Thirdly we will describe how we have worked in our project. The present article is not a report on the project, but is a description of how we have used the concepts of developmental pedagogy and, illustrated through empirical examples, some of the findings from each domain of art studied. Fourthly, in the empirical part of the article, we give examples of children's learning within our three domains. Finally, we discuss how the framework of developmental pedagogy and our empirical studies may contribute to children's learning within the arts.

The research fields

In this section we review the research literature on children's learning within music, dance and poetry. The review ends in a summary clarification of what, in our view, is lacking in this literature.

Music

In general, research on music in early years education can be characterised in terms of research on 'music for children' or research on 'children's music'. Traditionally, research on songs for children has dominated and this research mirrors the strong adult influence on children's musical activities in preschool (Jordan-Decarbo and Nelson 2002). Research on children's musical cultures has, on the other hand, focused the ancient concept of 'mousiké'[1] as an important factor, in which a broad approach of

music is integrated with dance, movements, arts and play (Jordan-Decarbo and Nelson 2002). The starting-point in children's musical expressions and activities is also often assumed to be promoting their creativity.

Social issues on learning in music have historically been conceptualised from different theoretical standpoints. Within this framework one distinction is made between 'vertical interaction' (between children/pupils and adult/teacher) and 'horizontal interaction' (among peers) (Olsson 2007). One social theme centres on children as active participants in their learning in collaboration with adults and other children (Holgersen 2002). Each participant influences the other. The concept of collaborative learning highlights the key impact that peer groups, family, teachers and other children have upon a child's interest in and knowledge of music. Several studies have highlighted the importance of parental support in children's playing and musical activities (Cope 1999, 2005; Cope and Smith 1997; Davidson et al. 1996; Davidson, Howe and Sloboda 1997; Gembris and Davidson 2002; McPherson 2005; O'Neill 2002a, 2002b; Temmerman 2005) and how children develop their personal identity as musical. Creech and Hallam (2003) elaborate issues on interpersonal interactions by incorporating two similar concepts: control and responsiveness. The concept of control is linked to discussions of the actor's influence and autonomy during the processes of learning. Whose influence is weak or strong? Does the child have a small or large autonomy? Responsiveness is close to the concept of parental style. Creech and Hallam (2003) stress that it is the interaction itself that is important for the child's learning. In the interaction between the parent and the child you may find several layers such as the confirmation of the child's role in the interaction, the support of the child's activities, the regulation to promote better performances, the feeling of togetherness and so forth. All these aspects strengthen the child's learning.

Creativity has for many years been recognised as a human characteristic that can be developed through education (Sharp 2001). In different curricula one finds statements that school shall enable pupils to think creatively and solve problems in an innovative way. Early childhood is considered to be a crucial time for the development of creativity and the strong links between creativity and the arts has been put forward. Sharp (2001) stresses that the teacher encouragement of children's play is fundamental but also that creative programmes involving the arts are important for enhancing children's creative skills. Transferable effects of arts education from creativity to learning within other fields like mathematics and foreign language still need to be proven through research-based evaluations. Winner and Hetland (2000), in their meta-analysis of research on transfer from art activities to other subject specific learning, point out that it is important to make two distinctions in the interpretations of the results:

> [I]f a positive effect is found, it is important to distinguish between two kinds of interpretations. Instruction in the arts might result in greater academic improvement than does direct academic instruction. This is one possibility. Or instruction in the arts, when integrated with academic instruction, might result in greater academic improvement than does academic instruction without the arts. This is a second possibility. We found far less evidence for the first of these conclusions than for the second, more plausible claim. (2000, 6)

This kind of reasoning construes the arts in domain-extrinsic terms, i.e., the arts are a means for developing capabilities outside the domains of the arts as such. In contrast, in our study, we focus on the development of domain-intrinsic knowing.

The dominating theoretical framework for studying children and music is cognitive psychology. The essence of the psychology of music has always been related to the development and acquisition of competencies of music (Colwell and Richardson 2002; Hargreaves 1986). Research in this field centres around issues like instruction, motivation and achievement, self-regulation and creativity. All these issues have more or less a clear link to different kinds of development. How can development be promoted from the teacher's perspective and how does one frame the best development of the child's learning? All the theories connected to musical development involve not only psychological research on the individual's behaviour and learning per se, but also the influence of contexts and social dimensions. In the well-known spiral model of musical development by Swanwick and Tillman (1986) musical thinking embraces the four layers of materials, expression, form and value for discussing children's compositions. Gardner (1990) reduced the development within the arts to three steps: preconventional, conventional and postconventional. Hargreaves and Galton (1992) make the distinction between general 'cognitive aesthetic development' and 'domain-specific developments' in which music is divided into four categories: singing, musical representation, melodic perception and musical composition. Hence, in this line of research, attempts are made to map typical domain-specific traits within each category.

The major research on musical teaching and learning in early childhood is connected to contexts in which musical experts are involved. Moreover, there is a strong focus on a narrow musical approach, i.e., the aims and objectives involve capabilities strictly connected to musical skills and knowledge related mainly to performance.

Dance/aesthetic movement

A substantial part of the literature on children and dance perceives dance as a means for promoting health and/or as gymnastics. However, this is not how we study dance in our project. For this reason, we will not review the literature that takes this focus. Rather, we are concerned with studying dance as dance, i.e., as an aesthetic domain with its own goals and characteristics. We use both terms 'dance' and 'aesthetic movement'. We use the latter term to refer to movements of an aesthetic kind, i.e., movements that have a representative form (a gestalt).

One of the classics in dance education is Rudolf Laban's book *Modern educational dance* (1963). The book is about 'free dance' or 'modern dance'. Laban suggests some tools useful in developing children's dance and aesthetic movements, such as contrasts between: pushing-pulling, sudden-preserved movements, strong-cautious, and narrow-wide movements. Children can repeat movements made by someone else or build a sequence of movements based on previous movements. Alternatively, a child may 'answer' another child's movements by doing the opposite movement or stance. Laban suggests that teachers can work with different dimensions of space, such as: high-low, right-left, forward-backward and diagonals. The basic point of Laban's dance education is to make children aware of different patterns and qualities of movement. He points out that even if it is 'free dance', children should not do whatever they want to. The teacher has an important role in supplementing and challenging the children's repertoire of ways of moving. Our perspective also emphasises the importance of the teacher giving children verbal feedback, and challenging children to express their ideas in dance and aesthetic movements.

In a similar vein, Arnold (2005) argues that learning to dance is dependent on the child's ability to appropriate what he calls 'aesthetical notions'. From our perspective, these notions could constitute what we will refer to as 'objects of learning' (see below). Further, Arnold argues that notions, 'whether to do with ideas or the emotions, are indispensable to an education in the arts, including dance' (54). He means that the learning of notions results in 'the cultivated skill to describe, analyse, interpret and evaluate' (54) one's own as well as others' aesthetical movements and forms of dance.

Bannon and Sanderson (2000) argue for a perspective in which the development of children's understanding of dance can be understood in terms of an expanded aesthetic awareness affording increased perceptual and conceptual grasp of the aesthetics of dance. Formulated in our terms, what is emphasised in this line of research is partly that the child becomes aware of aesthetic aspects and hence develops an increasing repertoire of tools for discerning aspects of dance. The theoretical accounts of Laban (1963), Arnold (2005) and Bannon and Sanderson (2000), are much in line with our present perspective on dance. However, our interest lies in using theoretical tools in promoting and studying actual learning practices with young children.

Finally, as Bannon and Sanderson (2000) point out, mainstream research in this area focuses on 'movement without thinking' or 'feeling without thinking'. Such a view stands in stark contrast to our present perspective.

Poetry

Kornei Chukovsky, the Russian poet, has had a tremendous impact on our knowledge of children's relation to and understanding of poetic language (Chukovsky 1925/1974). He discerns elements in children's language which distinguish poetic language to a great extent, e.g., rhyme, metre, metonymy, synonymy, antinomy and metaphor. He builds his arguments on rather unsystematic observations of children but has so far been the most influential researcher of children's poetic language. He also refers to Russian literature on educating children in order to support their poetic development, research hitherto unknown to the Western world.

Arnstein's *Children write poetry* (1967) as well as Koch's *Wishes, lies, and dreams: Teaching children to write poetry* (1971) have both focused on children and poetry. Both writers stress that children have a natural talent for writing poetry and that work with children should be aimed at letting children develop an awareness of their own capability to make poetry and not taught how to do. With a combination of restraint and liberty Koch supported children in their poetic work. He avoided tasks which implied predetermined rhyme and metre since these put restraints on the children, nor did he care much for spelling, punctuation or correct language. The teacher was not allowed to correct nor value children's poems. Georgia Heard (1987) is another poet following Koch. She does not teach children how to write poetry but starts with her own work as a poet and with what she knows about other poets' working practices.

However, the main bulk of research on children and poetry belongs to the field of emergent literacy. For example, many studies try to unravel whether rhyming may promote phonological awareness, as a precursor of emergent literacy skills, in the child (e.g., Martin and Byrne 2002; Muter et al. 2004). In such studies, rhyming is seen as a means to an end outside of the aesthetic domain as such. Our work on children and poetry differs from this line of research. In our project, the topic that

teachers want to develop children's knowing of, and that we want to study, is the domain-intrinsic aspect of poetry. For example, we were interested in whether children developed an understanding of what rhyming is or is not (Pramling and Asplund Carlsson 2008).

Summary

In our view, what is conspicuously absent in previous research on learning music, poetry and dance are empirical studies of how teachers work with these contents in pre- and primary school (in this case children aged 2–8 years old), and what the results are in terms of children's learning. More specifically, there is a lack of: (1) specific objects of learning (i.e., clear ideas about what capabilities or knowledge children are supposed to acquire); (2) dialogues and communication about what and how one goes about developing these skills and knowledge; and (3) the recognition and clarification of the important role of the teacher for young children's learning in the arts. In addition (4), we have emphasised the importance of focusing 'domain-intrinsic' learning, rather than simply viewing the arts as means for developing other 'domain-extrinsic' knowing.

Developmental pedagogy

The theoretical framework for our research project is developmental pedagogy (Pramling Samuelsson and Asplund Carlsson 2007, 2008) with the following specific features: meta-cognitive dialogues, learning act vs. learning object, discernment and variation.

In Scandinavia, developmental pedagogy has been developed during many years of research on children's learning in different domains, such as literacy, numeracy, nature and culture (e.g., Pramling 1988, 1994, 1996; Pramling Samuelsson 2006). The developmental pedagogical approach has proven to be powerful in contributing to developing children's understanding of different aspects of their surrounding world. However, this approach has not previously been used in relation to children's learning in the arts. At a general level, the role of the teacher is to create opportunities, situations, tasks, etc. that challenge children's ways of experiencing or making sense of something (Pramling 1994; Pramling Samuelsson and Asplund Carlsson 2007). In a more specific sense, developmental pedagogy is made up by a number of important concepts. These concepts will now be presented.

The act and object of learning

The first feature of this theoretical framework is the distinction made between the act and the object of learning. The act of learning (i.e., *how* children learn) does not stand in a simple relation to how children experience or perceive an object of learning (i.e., *what* children learn). In the developmental pedagogical theory, to learn means to change from one way of experiencing something to another way of experiencing the same thing. For example, children learn (experience) poetry by listening to poetry, but in order to learn a particular feature of poetry, such as metre or rhyme, the feature has to be brought into the foreground of children's awareness. Put a different way, the feature needs to be made into an object of learning. An important distinction that needs to be made here is between 'content of learning' and 'object of learning'. For

example, a content of learning in an English lesson could be 'poetry'. However, the object of learning would need to be far more specific and defined. Two examples of learning objects within poetry as a content of learning could be the difference between a metaphor and a simile, and the meaning of alliteration. Hence, the object of learning is more specific than the content of learning. The object of learning is the understanding that teachers want to develop in children.

Meta-level talk

Meta-cognitive dialogue is a tool that the teacher can use to make children aware of something particular. This means that the teacher has to *direct children's attention towards the object of learning*, that is, what s/he wants children to learn about or become aware of. Meta-cognitive dialogues are all about the communication and interaction the teacher and the children get involved in. Today, language is central in all theories of children's learning (Klein 1989; Nelson 1996; Säljö 2000) as well as in curricula for ECE (Pramling Samuelsson, Sheridan, and Williams 2006). Involving young children in communication and participation presupposes an openness in the teacher for children to feel confident in influencing and taking initiatives (Emilson 2007). This teacher's skill, in part, consists of being able to get children to express themselves and then to take the child's perspective, that is, to understand the child's sense-making (Doverborg and Pramling Samuelsson 2000). Taking children's perspectives, getting them to express themselves and interpreting what they say are the dimensions of communication that are necessary for conducting meta-cognitive dialogues. In a metacognitive dialogue, children are challenged to think, ponder and communicate about what most often is taken for granted: how and why one thinks the way one does. It is a question of problematising the invisible and the assumptions the communication is based on (see also Elbers 2004; Mercer and Littleton 2007).

The following is an example of how communication becomes metacognitive. We had asked the teachers to carry out a lesson in which the children were asked to draw or paint a piece of music. At the beginning, the children just listened to the music. Next, they were given the equipment they needed for drawing and painting (paper, pencils and watercolours). Some children drew instruments, or notes, others drew objects they imagined they heard in the music – elephants, ballet dancers, birds – while some children drew non-figuratively (abstract patterns). The teachers then talked to the children about their drawings and paintings and let them explain what they thought when they made them. In this way the meaning of painting music and what they themselves bore in mind during the exercise could become clear to the children. They communicated how they thought about the task they had been given.

The next step was to make it clear to the children that one can think in many different ways when painting music. Some of the children were given the task of sorting the paintings according to their own choice, and putting them up on a wall in the corridor. One way to sort them was according to motive, a second according to colour and a third as 'nice' or 'ugly' paintings. Finally, the children decided how to sort them. Here, the teacher could have chosen to stop the exercise, but she chose to continue and asked the children how they thought when they sorted the paintings. They were asked to explain different ways of sorting the paintings, in order to make it clear that it is possible to paint music in many different ways. In this dialogue the following was made visible to the children:

- There were many different ways to illustrate the piece of music they had listened to.
- There were many different ways to sort these illustrations.

The teacher ended the exercise by asking the children what they had experienced during the lesson and if they had discovered anything new in the music.

Discernment and variation

In order to be able to focus on an object of learning, something specific needs to be *discerned* (Gibson and Gibson 1955) from something else. A necessary condition for discernment is *variation* (Marton, Runesson, and Tsui 2004). If children are supposed to learn to move in relation to music, or follow the pulse of the music, pulse must be experienced *as* pulse by the children. It is then not enough to play the same piece of music over and over again for children to appropriate this skill. The awareness of tempo can only be developed by variation in tempo. When the tempo varies, tempo can be experienced *as* tempo. A simple way of using variation to provide opportunities for discernment is to introduce clear cases of contrast (e.g., high-low, treble-bass, fast-slow). Hence, careful management of such patterns of variation and invariance is essential if teachers want to bring about learning as previously defined.

The same reasoning goes for learning poetry. Children do not come to understand what poetry is by listening to it or telling it by heart, but can learn about poetry through the teacher making the principles of poetry visible via a variation of different ways of talking about poetry. Obviously, children do not learn more or better the more something varies. What needs to vary is precisely the dimension that the teacher wants children to discern and experience. If everything varies it becomes a 'blur' of activity for children. Viewed in these terms, an important aspect of development is appropriating tools (e.g., categories and distinctions) through which the child is able to make increasingly finer discernments of phenomena (Pramling Samuelsson and Pramling 2009). An example would be a child, through gaining access to new tools, goes from hearing 'music' (in a general sense) to becoming able to discern the form of the piece, its instrumentation, perhaps changes in tempo, etc.

Summary

The concepts of developmental pedagogy, briefly discussed above, constitute the theoretical and practical framework (Pramling Samuelsson and Asplund Carlsson 2008) of promoting and studying younger children's learning in the present research project. The features of developmental pedagogy presented here have emphasised (a) the importance of the teacher having a clear object of learning in mind; (b) engaging the children in meta-talk, and (c) providing patterns of variation and invariance in order to facilitate children's discernment of important aspects of the object of learning.

How we have worked: In-service education and data-production

Since the teachers in preschool and school have the task of developing children, we have given the teachers in-service education in order for them to be able to develop children's abilities within music, poetry and dance. Some researchers (e.g., Pound

and Harrison 2003) have pointed out that teachers often lack competence within the arts. Many teachers in preschool and primary school do not practice any form of art themselves. For example, many teachers may not know how to write poetry, to dance in a variety of ways, or to listen musically to a varied repertoire of music. The in-service education consisted of a series of lectures by, among others, a dance teacher and a composer. The teachers were given 'tools' of the domains of art studied. The research team has also helped the teachers to appropriate the theoretical foundation of developmental pedagogy upon which this project builds, i.e., the teachers have read and discussed the main textbook used: Pramling Samuelsson and Asplund Carlsson (2007 [in Swedish, 2003]; see also, Pramling Samuelsson and Asplund Carlsson 2008). However, at the heart of our work we have looked at some of the video recordings from the participating teachers' practice and discussed what we see: what happens, what worked, what difficulties do children and teachers face, and what can be developed?

We have collected extensive data in the form of video-recordings from preschools and primary schools when teachers and children work with music, dance and poetry. Sometimes we have asked the teachers to work with something particular (e.g., listening to music). At other times the teachers have chosen something that they would like to get our feedback on. We have let the teachers perform certain activities and then we have looked for possible learning objects in the activities. We have also tried the opposite, i.e., given the teachers a list of possible learning objects and then let the teachers come up with ways in which to try to develop children's understanding of these learning objects. Formulating learning objects within the arts has proven a challenge for teachers and researchers alike. We will return to this issue in the discussion.

Results

In this section we will reconnect to what we previously pointed out as lacking in the research field of young children and the arts. We will show some excerpts from our data in the form of transcripts from digital video recordings to illustrate how our perspective can be used to fill these gaps. What we have tried to promote and study in our work with the teachers and children are instances: (1) where the arts, or the aesthetics, are regarded as goals in themselves, and not just as means for something else (for example to achieve social ability or support emotional development); (2) where the focus is on learning or sense-making, not just on the activities; and (3) where meta-cognitive talk is brought into a learning situation. We will also look at how progression in the arts can be viewed.

Representing music and teachers' talk

In order to give examples of the points above, we refer first to two situations from one preschool where they work with the same task, to visually represent music on paper with watercolours. In the first example the teacher introduces the task:

And now you'll think of how the music feels.

The teacher has attached a large piece of paper to a table and six children stand around ready to paint. The music starts playing. After a while the music is stopped and the teacher tells the children to rotate one step to the left and to get ready to paint on a

new part of the paper. The children protest loudly several times, but the teacher persists. This sequence of listening, painting and rotating goes on for some time. Eventually, the exercise ends up in chaos. The children start to paint themselves and each other's hands and faces.

After watching this we asked the teacher about the purpose of including the rotation in the design of the task. She replied that she wanted the children to practice cooperation and to learn to create a collaborative painting. The original task of representing the sound of the music disappeared into the background of the activity of mastering the watercolours and practicing cooperation.

In the second example, a few months later, the teacher handles the situation quite differently. She introduces the same task to the children and asks them to listen to the music and take special notice of 'how it sounds', for example if the music is 'fast or slow'. The children each get a piece of paper and are seated around the table. The outcome of this learning situation is completely different from the first occasion. The children talk about their paintings in relation to the music, particularly focusing on the structure and tempo of the music. Their drawings and their talk are related to aspects intrinsic to the music.

The difference between these two examples, in our view, is the way that the teacher introduces the task and the way she directs the children's attention through her questions. In the first example, she asked about feelings in the music and about the painting (not necessarily related), while in the second example she talked about the painting as a representation of the music. To learn how to represent music became a goal in itself, and the music became more than a background sound to a training in cooperation. Representing music on paper moved from being the act of learning to becoming the object of learning.

Questions, metatalk and domain-intrinsic distinctions

As an example of meta-cognitive talk we will here demonstrate how the teachers ask the children developing questions. When the episode starts, the children (five years old) and the teacher sit in a circle on the floor and talk about a book they have previously worked with. The conversation turns into a discussion about tones:

Teacher 1:   But I don't understand, how tones? How do you mean then? How?
[Joel goes and gets a songbook from the piano in the room].
Teacher 1:   Now you have to explain to me.
Joel: Here is a tone [points at the notes in the book].
Teacher 1:   Aha, so this is tones. And that. But what about this (points in the first book, a book with poetry)?
Joel: That is text.
Teacher 1:   Aha, that is text. So, what is, now I don't quite understand. Tones are there [points at the notes] and text is here [points at the text].
Joel: Mm.
Teacher 1:   What, well what do you have tones for? Or, why do you have tones, what are tones?
Joel: Tones are this [points at the notes].
Teacher 1:   Yes, but what do tones mean?
Teacher 2:   What are they good for?
Joel: To play music with.
Teacher 1:   Aha, to write music.
Teacher 2:   To play music.
Teacher 1:   To play music, is that what tones are for? Aha.

In this excerpt, the teachers pose several developing questions such as 'How do you mean?', 'What do you have tones for?' and 'What do tones mean?'. By asking the child to explain, the teacher challenges the child's way of thinking. This excerpt also functions as an example of the teacher's use of contrast as a principle for making something discernable (visible). By contrasting notes (music) and text, the differences (and perhaps similarities) between these two forms of communication are made visible to the child. Through the teacher's developing questions, Joel in this sequence goes from merely pointing to formulating a general principle: tones are for playing music.

Representational dance

An example from the domain of dance is the following, taken from a preschool. A group of children and their teachers have sung about different animals. They then proceed to include dancing in the activity. In these transcripts, words in *italics* are sung whilst the rest is spoken:

Teacher 2:   Now we have heard how the jungle animals sound. Then we need to see how they dance as well, don't we?
Children: Yes.
Teacher 2:   We can start with a monkey. Neil wants that.

Everybody [while Teacher 1 bangs a drum]: *If we want to, we can dance, yes we can dance like little monkeys. If we want to, we can dance, yes we can dance like little monkeys. And shagga dagga dagg, we go in and make a clap* [here everybody dances in towards the centre of the circle and there they clap when they sing 'clap'. Then they dance outwards again]. *Shagga dagga dagg, we go out and make a jump* [which they do].

The teacher then asks 'What other jungle animals do we have?' The children give various suggestions such as 'elephant' and 'tiger'. When singing about the elephant, at the point in the singing and dancing when they clap in the middle of the circle, the teachers instead suggests 'a beep', which the children readily pick up on and do. The singing and dancing continues with new animals. When it comes to the place of the clapping, the tiger instead gets a 'mrrr, rrrr' and the snake gets a 'ssss'-ing sound. In fact, what to do when in the middle of the circle comes up for negotiation when the teacher says: 'How do we do now, then?' Finally, the singing and dancing ends with the following exchange and activity:

Teacher 1:   And then it was that with which we started really.
Teacher 2:   Monkey?
Teacher 1:   Yes, what did they eat?
Children: Banana.
Children: Dance banana.
Children: We shall dance like bananas now.
Teacher 2:   Shall we dance like bananas?
Children: Yes.
Teacher 1:   How does a banana dance, huh?
[The children bend their bodies like bananas and 'turn' themselves.]

They sing and dance as bananas. Once again, what to do when having danced into the centre of the circle comes up for negotiation:

Everybody:	*Ragga dagga dagg, we go in and make a clap.*
Teacher 2:	Clap.
Johanna:	No, no clap. A bend.
Teacher 2:	A bend?
Johanna:	Yes.
[They dance the banana again.]	

From our present perspective, two things are of most interest in this sequence. Firstly, while singing and dancing the 'same' song, there is a variation in how to do the sound and movement of each animal. The children take the initiative in developing the activity and the teachers respond to this playfulness. Secondly, through experiencing this variation within an invariant theme, a child comes up with the idea that they should dance like bananas. The children also suggest that the banana should make a bend instead of a clap. The variation in the sequence appears to help the children reach two important insights into this kind of dance: (1) There is a kind of dance that is representational, i.e., you can dance *like* or *as* something, which is different from merely dancing *to music* or dancing *with another*; and (2) It is possible to dance as practically anything, even a banana. Two particular challenges are facing teachers in relation to this illustration. One thing is to be systematic in the patterns of variation and invariance that tend to be present more or less unsystematically in most if not all learning practices. Another thing is that this presumes that the teacher is clear about what the object of learning is, i.e., what s/he wants children to discern.

Progression: The case of rhyming

An important issue in pedagogical institutions such as preschool and primary school is progression of children's understanding and capabilities. In this section, we will analyse and illustrate how the analytical tool of 'discernment' can be useful in clarifying progression in rhyming. Consider the following example from a preschool working on trying to develop children's understanding of and ability to rhyme (for a more extensive and largely different analysis of children's rhyming, see Pramling and Asplund Carlsson 2008).

   Within the domain of poetry, rhyme is a basic constituent. While rhyme is not necessary for poetry, the genres of poetry that are a part of children's lives in preschool tend to be rhymed. Three examples of a teacher and children conversing about rhyme will be presented and analysed. These brief excerpts can also be seen as points in the development of the ability to rhyme. In the transcript, words in *italics* rhyme (in the original language if not always in the English translation), and words underlined are not actual but made-up words. What different aspects of what constitutes a rhyme have the children discerned in the three verbal exchanges that follow? The teacher and a small group of children sit in a circle on the floor:

Teacher:	Yes anything else that rhymes then?
[…]	
Fredrika:	Shoe foot.
Teacher:	Shoe foot, well, one could have the foot in a shoe, that's right, but not quite that it rhymes exactly.

Fredrika has not yet learned what a rhyme is. Instead of the sounding aspect she attends to the meaning of the words, that they are associated with one another (shoe

and foot). However, she has discerned one foundational aspect of what makes a rhyme a rhyme. She connects two words, she does not point to the object referred to by the initial word. Hence, she has discerned that rhyme is a relation between words, not between word and world.

Teacher:	Did you think about something, that when they, in the verses, that it *swung* and *sung*.
Malin:	It rhymes.
Teacher:	Yes, *hear* and
Malin:	*Ear*.
Teacher:	Ear. It rhymes as you said, Malin, it does.

In addition to the aspect of rhyme discerned in the first excerpt, Malin has also discerned that rhyming builds upon the sound of the ending of words. It is interesting to note that she still uses words that are also related in meaning (hear and ear).

Partik:	<u>Blot</u>, <u>blo</u>.
Teacher:	<u>*Blo*</u>, *shoe* yes.
Sven:	Eh, *cow*, <u>*plow*</u>.
Teacher:	*Cow <u>flo</u>*.
Sven:	*Gro <u>flo</u>*.
Teacher:	And *gro <u>flo</u>*.

In this excerpt, the sound relationship between words has clearly been distinguished from the meaning relationship. Nonsense words (sounds, not actual words) are made up. The children in this excerpt have discerned that rhyming is independent of meaning or sense. In sequence, these three excerpts illustrate a progression in the ability to rhyme that is present at the same time in the group of children. In this way, the concept of 'discernment' of 'critical features or aspects' of a 'learning object' (Marton and Tsui 2004), i.e., the capability or insight the teacher wants to develop in children, can help clarify in detail what children need to find out, and what teachers can help children become aware of, in order to develop their ability to rhyme. The variation of aspects discerned within the group of children at a point in time could be made the focus through meta-communicative dialogues (Pramling 1996) in order to make children aware of what they do when they rhyme. Hence, this variety of understanding about what rhymes and why, could be used as stepping-stones in a developmental pedagogy (see Pramling Samuelsson and Asplund Carlsson 2008).

Teachers' learning

Even if children's learning is in focus for our project at large as well as in this article, we have also seen how the participating teachers have developed. Particularly, we have seen an increasing awareness among the teachers during the project when it comes to the act and object of learning. A brief illustration of this is the following. After a lesson in music and movement, two teachers made the following comment:

Teacher 1:	Well, to pose the question 'what do we want', I've never thought of that before when it comes to music. Music is like 'what shall we do, which songs shall we sing and how will we do it?'
Teacher 2:	And does it suit the theme and the subject and all that…

Teacher 1: But nowadays when we plan, we say, 'well, so what do we want and why do we do this'.

From being engaged in activities, i.e., what to *do* and whether the activity fits in with the other subjects on the schedule, the teachers now express an insight into the importance of making clear to themselves what they want the children to develop when it comes to music. We have seen the teachers beginning to ask themselves questions like the teachers above, which we consider to be a prerequisite for making specific learning objects visible to children.

Discussion

With our research we have raised the question of what learning objects can be distinguished in music, dance and poetry with children in the early years of schooling, i.e., what are children supposed to learn? We have thus been able to distinguish several possible learning objects. In music some examples are: discerning different aspects of music (e.g., the sound of specific instruments, pitch, tempo), developing different ways of representing music (visually, bodily and verbally) and learning to listen in a musical way. In dance, some examples of learning objects would be: sudden and extended movements, symmetrical and asymmetrical movements, coordination with others and with music. In poetry the issues of rhyme (Pramling and Asplund Carlsson 2008) and metaphoric language are two such learning objects. Thinking in terms of learning objects within the domains of the arts (music, poetry and dance) is rare. It became obvious during our project that this posed a challenge to teachers and researchers alike. The traditional emphasis in the arts as means for other (domain-extrinsic) ends has had the consequence of teachers and researchers not studying and promoting the development of domain-intrinsic knowing within the arts in young children's early schooling. Our approach puts the development of children's capabilities within the arts on the agenda. The arts are foundational constituents of early schooling (e.g., in preschool). They deserve to be taken seriously as forms of knowledge in themselves that children should be given opportunities for developing their knowledge of. Hence, we argue for the importance of helping children, through pedagogy, to develop domain-intrinsic knowing of the arts, rather than merely using the arts as means for developing art-extrinsic knowing. Learning in preschool and the first years of primary school cannot only be matters of mathematics, reading and writing. That is too limited a view of human capabilities and cultural life. In this article, we have explicated what the constituents of knowing in three domains of art could be and suggested tools and approaches for developing children's competences in the arts.

We have argued for an increased use of meta-cognitive dialogues and communication about what and how one goes about developing these skills and knowledge. Creating systematic patterns of variation and invariance is also a useful pedagogical means for helping children discern aspects that they otherwise frequently conflate. For example, in music, pitch needs to be distinguished from dynamic, since these two dimensions of variation often are conflated by learners. In dance, distinguishing between two senses of 'same': doing something simultaneously and doing the same movement as someone else is one important distinction to make clear to children. In some poetry, the question of what rhyming is and is not needs to be made clear in order to make children aware of their increasing ability to rhyme.

We have emphasised the importance of the role of the teacher in children's learning in the arts. Children are creative and masters of play, but in order to become aware of distinctions, variation and invariance of the phenomena of the arts, children must be challenged by the teacher in order to clarify and to develop their thoughts. Some important roles of the teacher in children's learning of the arts are introducing domain-intrinsic concepts and distinctions. Teachers often introduce such tools through the terminology in which they phrase their questions to children (see the example of tones and text above; see also, Pramling and Wallerstedt 2009). These distinctions and concepts become the tools through which children develop their aesthetic perception. From theoretical and empirical literature there is reason to suggest that this way of developing perceiving also facilitates 'production' of, e.g., poems or dances, since our actions are contingent how we 'see' things:

> In relation to particular aims, some ways of seeing are more powerful than others. Powerful ways of acting derive from powerful ways of seeing, and the way that something is seen or experienced is a fundamental feature of learning. If we want learners to develop certain capabilities, we must make it possible for them to develop a certain way of seeing or experiencing. Consequently, arranging for learning implies arranging for developing learners' ways of seeing or experiencing, that is, developing the eyes through which the world is perceived. (Marton, Runesson, and Tsui 2004, 8)

Thus, in terms of the traditional metaphor of knowing as seeing (Goatly 1997), learning to 'see' is a prerequisite for 'producing' art. Perceiving is not a passive reception, it is an activity affording artful production. In order to express certain artistic qualities, those qualities or aspects need to have been discerned.

The issue of progression in children learning of the arts must also be recognised. The perspective taken in this article of development as the ability to make increasingly finer discernment of critical aspects of phenomena makes visible *in detail* children's understanding. Making visible how the child has understood the object of learning (i.e., which aspects s/he has discerned) also makes clear precisely what a teacher needs to help children discern in furthering their understanding of the object of learning. In this article we have illustrated these points through the example of rhyming.

The arts are important in young children's lives and an integral part of life in a culture. For these reasons, it is important that early years education has access to powerful tools in helping young children learn in these domains. In this article, we have presented one such framework, developmental pedagogy, for developing and studying young children's 'domain-intrinsic' knowing in music, dance and poetry.

Note

1. A modern version of the old concept of 'mousiké' may be 'arts education', in which a broad interdisciplinary approach to the different art forms (dance, drama, music, painting, etc.) is promoted. The concept of, for example, music is much narrower, focusing only on musical activities and experience.

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