

# One word to rule them?

The word *aesthetics* in curricula for the Swedish compulsory school of today

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The aim of this article is to analyse how the word *aesthetic(s)* is used in the contemporary curriculum (Lpo 94) and syllabuses for compulsory school education in Sweden. This will be done from a Wittgensteinian point of view, with an emphasis on the diversity in the usage of the word. Lpo 94's use of the concept of aesthetics indicates that it is seen as something complementary and different to intellectual knowledge and bodily knowledge. It seems as if it has some kind of existentialist meaning. Apart from this, the curriculum says nothing about what this complementary thing called aesthetics is. This might explain why the syllabuses for 13 out of 23 subjects mention the word *aesthetics* in quite different ways: as a tool for value and judgement, as a skill, as experience, as a way of expressing oneself, as a certain kind of knowledge, as a secondary tool for learning other skills/subjects and as a way to describe a subject. The article ends with reflections on what purpose the curriculum has when words are used in such a diverse manner.

## Introduction

In Nordic education, subjects and themes like music, dance, arts and crafts, physical education and drama are often referred to as “practical-aesthetic subjects”. The word *aesthetic(s)* is used as a noun, a verb and an adjective, both in everyday language and in legal documents and school textbooks. On this basis it would be easy to assume that the word has a clear definition, understood by all agents in this field. Having spent most of our lives in the Norwegian and Swedish education systems, as a pupil, student, teacher or researcher, our experience tells us clearly that this is not the case.

As a part of its strategy to offer all children the same educational opportunities, the Swedish government has a system of regulations as to what should be taught and learned in schools. Every school in Sweden is bound by national regulations. At the top of the hierarchy is the law governing schools, the Education Act. Then there are the Compulsory School Curriculum (hereafter called Lpo 94, since that is the abbreviation commonly used in Sweden) and the national syllabuses, which were last revised in 1998 (Utbildningsdepartementet 2001a). Based on these documents, each school and every local authority is obliged to draw up local plans for how to implement this in a local setting. In this article we will focus on how the word *aesthetic(s)* is used in the national syllabuses and in the Compulsory School Curriculum. Rather than giving a stipulative definition, we will explore the different flavours of aesthetics that are presented.

The aim of this article is in other words to find out how the word *aesthetic(s)* reveals itself in the Swedish curriculum and syllabuses. By going through governing documents for Sweden's compulsory school system and searching for the intentions and inherent meanings implicated by the usage of the word, we hope that both the reader and we ourselves will have a fuller understanding of it by the end of the article. From the first look it was obvious that *aesthetic(s)* is used in various ways throughout the syllabuses. As part of our method as well as a kind of result, the article will present a way to systematize how *aesthetics* operates in the different settings studied. To be able to understand the word in a broader context, it is necessary to view how *aesthetics* has been used historically in philosophy, and what the current status of the word is, as well as to define the theoretical foundations on which this article will be built.

## An outline of philosophical views of aesthetics and the current state of the concept

The history of a philosophy of aesthetics is not as old as the roots of the word may suggest. While the word originates from the ancient Greek *aisthētikos*, which means "of sense perception" (Pickett 2000), aesthetics as a philosophical concept can only be traced back to the 18th century. In 1750, Baumgarten published his book *Aesthetica*. The idea of making a philosophical system out of the beauty of the arts had been growing in the intellectual communities of Europe, and Baumgarten was the first to develop what could be called a scientific system of aesthetics (Kristeller 1952, p. 33). Coincidentally it

was his view of what the content of a philosophy of art and beauty should be, “a theory of perception” (Dahlhaus 1995, p. 5), that guided his construction of the word. His choice of word to label this branch of philosophy was therefore a German adaptation of the Greek word *aisthētikos*: *aesthetica* (Emt 1996), which has subsequently evolved into *Ästhetik* in German, *aesthetics* or *esthetics* in English, *esthétique* in French and *estetik(k)* in the Scandinavian languages. Baumgarten’s word was adopted, as was his view that there needed to be a scientific way to talk about art and beauty, but his premise which was the basis for the word, namely the distinction between what is perceived through the senses and what is understood by the intellect, was soon abandoned (Emt 1996). Immanuel Kant might be considered the one who defined a *philosophy of art* (Kristeller 1951) that endured the test of time. After being extremely critical of Baumgarten’s concept in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he developed the concept of aesthetics to a fuller extent than anyone so far in his *Critique of Judgement* (Kant 2000). In this book Kant uses the concept of aesthetics to talk about judgement of taste and the beautiful. At the beginning of the first part, “Critique of aesthetic judgement”, he states that aesthetic judgement is “not a cognitive judgement, and so not logical, but is aesthetic – which means that it is one whose determining ground cannot be other than subjective” (Kant 2000, p. 49). Despite the subjective nature of aesthetics, Kant recognizes the human wish to make universal claims as to what is good taste (Kant 2000). This dispute regarding taste, normativity, subjectivity and objectivity has been a key point in the philosophy of aesthetics. According to Hans-Georg Gadamer (1995), Kant did not intend his theory to be a *philosophy of art*, but his theories have been interpreted as such by others.

Aesthetic theories and discussions of art flourished in the 19th century, and they were elaborated on, discussed and developed amongst philosophers and artists alike. Aesthetics was developed into a science of beauty in the arts, where discussions revolved around how to perceive beauty in art and how to evaluate what defines good art (Dahlhaus 1992). This branch of philosophy developed further in the 20th century as a result of the wish of artists to detach art from common taste, and to escape the prison of beauty. On this basis Heidegger argues that there has been an aesthetification of art. By this he means that it is no longer representation that is important for an art object, but the forms, lines, sounds, shapes and concepts in themselves. This leads, in Heidegger’s (Young 2001) view, to the death of art, because art is supposed to be an “absolute necessity, not items

of luxury to provide stress relief” (Young 2001, p. 8). Adorno and Horkheimer worked in the early part of the 20th century and were part of what has been known as “the Frankfurt school”, which defined what is now known as critical theory. Adorno’s writings on aesthetics have been influential because he brought together social theory and aesthetic theory, such as that of Kant and Hegel, in the light of modern art, but with a critique of modern western society as a fundamental presumption. Their claim was that the pursuit of freedom in society is inseparable from the pursuit of enlightenment in culture (Zuidervaart 2003). It is with this heritage that Pierre Bourdieu enters the scene in the last half of the century, claiming that aesthetics exists, but as a socially and historically constructed silent agreement between *agents in a field*<sup>1</sup> (Bourdieu 1996a). This sociological and critical view of aesthetics developed simultaneously as a more experience-, psychologically and phenomenologically based branch, represented by John Dewey and later Hans-Georg Gadamer and Richard Shusterman. Dewey (Shusterman 2000) bases his theory of aesthetics on experience and argues that good art gives rise to good aesthetic experiences. Shusterman (1999), who claims to put forward a pragmatic view of aesthetics, sums up the previous century like this:

Dewey’s essentially evaluative, phenomenological, and transformational notion of aesthetic experience has been gradually replaced by a purely descriptive, semantic one whose chief purpose is to explain and thus support the established demarcation of art from other human domains (Shusterman 1999, ch. 3).<sup>2</sup>

Shusterman goes on to criticize the dismissing of the concept of aesthetic experience which is the solution provided by several philosophers to the challenge of the impossible task of defining what aesthetics is, and what sets aesthetic experience apart from other experiences. Gadamer (1995) takes the same line when he suggests integrating aesthetics into hermeneutics.

The current state of the philosophy of aesthetics is of course a difficult landscape to explore, since writing history is easier in retrospect. Preluding the turn of the millennium, the concept of truth has degenerated along with notions of object/objectivism versus subject/subjectivism. As part of what is often referred to as postmodernism, there are no longer any main paradigms of truth to relate to – truth is seen as temporary and relative to time and space. Leading theories are referred to by names like “social constructivism”, “deconstructivism” and “post-structuralism”, all of them aiming to explain how mean-

ing is constructed in society, in and between human beings (Jackson 1996; Kjørup 1996). If everything is constructed in society and nothing is true, what then is the purpose of philosophy? And if anything goes as far as good taste is concerned, what is the point of discussing aesthetics? Metaphilosophic discussions like this have been growing in recent decades. This does not mean that the whole field of aesthetic philosophy has changed into metaphilosophy, but there does seem to be a tendency to doubt that there is such a thing as aesthetics, or philosophy for that matter (Shusterman 1999).

In a report from a recent research project on aesthetics in Swedish schools, Jan Thavenius (2004) states that *aesthetics* has many meanings and lists five different ones, the first being quite similar to what Baumgarten proposed – a sensory as opposed to an intellectual meaning. The second meaning is more along the lines of Kant and the 19th century’s view of aesthetics as the philosophy of beauty in art. These two are in Thavenius’s view the ones most commonly used in the school context. The third extends the second meaning to include popular cultural expressions as well, while the fourth meaning is that of an “aesthetification” of society, the tendency for society to become more focused on how people present themselves through artefacts. The last sense is a sociological meaning of aesthetics; how the concept functions in society (Thavenius 2004).<sup>3</sup> These meanings of aesthetics are on quite different levels, but they do provide insights into the complexity of defining the term. However, they lack a differentiation between an experiential, existentialist and expressionist level, as well as tools to discuss relations between social and individualist views, since these units of meaning are presented with no ontological basis. In our discussion we will not follow this structure, but we will refer to Thavenius’s categories on occasion.

To be able to discuss the results of our investigation of the usage of *aesthetic(s)*, there is a need to clarify some of the methodological and ontological foundations for this article. What view of the world and knowledge should be applied when reading it?

## How to discuss and analyse the word

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1933, 1960) provided a starting point as to how to address this challenge of clarifying what aesthetics means in the Swedish compulsory school curriculum. Since *aesthetic(s)* is a living, breathing word in the Swedish language, it will have different meanings depending on in which setting it is being used, by whom and when. Wittgenstein’s solution was to let language live its own

life, and let science do what science does best: work with things that can be counted. He never managed to follow his own advice though, and his thoughts on language seem very appropriate in the light of late modernist and postmodernist theories.

One definition of *definition* is that it is an explanation of what a word means. Bengt Molander (1988) points out that there are several possible ways to achieve this. The most common kind of definition in scientific texts is what is called a nominal (Emt & Hermerén 1990) or stipulative definition (Molander 1988). The point of such definitions is to limit the understanding of a word so that the reader understands it in the same way as the author. That is to say, the author tries to persuade the reader to buy his or her understanding of the word, so that the reader understands what the author is implying by using it. Other types of definition are to point at an object to name it, or to use so-called lexical definitions, which are short descriptions of how a word is used (Copi 1982).

Wittgenstein (1960) introduced a different perspective on definition: “Questions like ‘what is the meaning of a word?’ paralyse us because we feel there must be a thing called ‘meaning’ that we ought to be able to point to. We should ask a different question: ‘what is an explanation of the meaning of a word?’”. This is how Wittgenstein (1960) opens the Blue Book.

On this basis, the present text will not try to give a nominal or stipulative definition, but rather, as Wittgenstein proposes, attempt to discern different aspects of the word, and how it might be understood, and to give insights into the possibilities and problems regarding this usage.

To identify and structure the different meanings of aesthetics used in the syllabuses, a document was prepared comprising all the paragraphs containing the word *aesthetic(s)*, so as to be able to read them and directly compare them. A struggle in this process was to avoid previous understandings of the word getting in the way of what the text said. Although we know that it is impossible to read without previous knowledge interfering, it is important to strive for an unbiased look at the empirical material to be studied: to be as critical of our own objectifications as of the material we objectify (Bourdieu 1996b). The texts were scanned for patterns, to see whether some uses of the word formed certain units of familiarity. On a more concrete level, what we did was to separate the paragraphs containing the word *aesthetic(s)*. Reading these carefully, on their own and in the light of the text as a whole, we tried to let the text talk to us and wrote down all our associations arising from how the word was used.

These keywords were numbered and we tried to put the possible numbers next to related uses of the word. After this first crude categorization, 16 different uses of the word had been singled out. These were eventually slimmed down to seven. Based on this structure, which was by no means meant to represent a final classification defining aesthetics, the different ways the word manifests itself in the documents are discussed below. Since the themes are not meant to be exclusive, they should be looked upon as different angles on the same phenomenon and will therefore overlap. Several of the quotations have in fact been placed under more than one theme. Those under the *skill* theme, as well as under the theme *value and judgement*, also frequently appear under other themes, which may explain their quantitative edge over the other themes.

## The content of the contemporary Swedish curriculum

The word *aesthetic(s)* appears in 13 out of 23 national syllabuses<sup>4</sup>, as well as in the general curriculum – Lpo 94 (Utbildningsdepartementet 2001a). There are obvious inconsistencies in the way the word is used in these different syllabuses, and the following discussion will hopefully uncover some of the meanings of the word as it reveals itself through the different texts. Possible explanations as to why the 13 syllabuses in question use the word, while the others do not, will also be covered. In Lpo 94 we read:

The school should stimulate each pupil towards self-development and personal growth. It should focus not only on intellectual but also practical, sensual and aesthetic aspects. Pupils should have the opportunity of experiencing the expression of knowledge in different ways. They should also be encouraged to try out and develop different modes of expression and experience feelings and moods. Drama, movement, dance, music and creativity in art, writing and design should all form part of the school's activity. Harmonious development and education provides opportunities for exploring, researching, acquiring and representing different forms of knowledge and experiences. Creative ability is a part of what the pupils should acquire (Utbildningsdepartementet 2001a, p. 8).

Here *aesthetic* seems to refer either to some sort of a skill, some tool to stimulate individual growth, or some way of perceiving the world. Or maybe all three. Aesthetics is set alongside intellectual, practical



and sensual aspects, which combined are supposed to stimulate the pupil's personal growth. The word *aspect* in itself gives no indication as to whether Lpo 94 is talking about aesthetics as a skill, as a way of expressing oneself, or as a way to perceive the world, but considering the rest of the cited text, there seems to be an indication that the word *aesthetics* means all of these things. To refer to Thavenius (2004), this seems to correspond to his first and second units of meaning (*a sensory as opposed to an intellectual meaning* and *aesthetics as the philosophy of beauty in art*). What Thavenius's meanings lack, but is present in the above quotation, is an experiential and existentialist level. By this we mean that there seems to be a discourse represented in the quotation which says that aesthetics provides something fundamental to human existence, and that there is a certain aesthetic experience at the root of this. His three last units of meaning do not seem very relevant in this case. The quote above is the only time *aesthetic(s)* is used in Lpo 94 – it is in the syllabuses that the word really flourishes.

The syllabuses for Swedish compulsory school education cover all the 22 subjects taught in the schools. The syllabuses for art, crafts, home and consumer studies, mathematics, music, physical education and health, science studies<sup>5</sup>, biology, chemistry, physics, religion, technology<sup>6</sup> and social studies all use the word *aesthetic(s)*. The rest, civics, English, geography, history, modern languages, mother tongue, sign language for the hearing, Swedish as a second language and Swedish, do not. The subjects which make use of the word are not only the ones that are referred to in everyday language as practical-aesthetic subjects. In fact, both English and Swedish, which to a large extent are concerned with what is generally considered art, poetry and prose, do not use the word, while less obvious subjects like chemistry, physics, biology and maths do.

A careful examination of the sections referring to aesthetics, in the light of the whole text and of the other sections containing the word, combined with detailed studies of each individual paragraph containing *aesthetics*, finally led us to identify seven different uses of the word:<sup>7</sup>

- Aesthetics as a tool for value and judgement.
- Aesthetics as a skill.
- Aesthetics as experience.
- Aesthetics as a way of expressing oneself.
- Aesthetics as a certain kind of knowledge.
- Aesthetics as a secondary tool for learning other skills/subjects.
- Aesthetics as a way to describe a subject.



The table below shows which uses are present in which subjects:<sup>8</sup>

	Value and judgement	Skill	Experience	Expression	Knowledge	Secondary tool	Describe subject
Art						X	X
Crafts	X	X					
Home & consumer	X						
Math	X		X				
Music		X	X	X			
Physical education	X	X		X			
Science studies					X		
Biology	X		X				
Chemistry	X						
Physics	X						
Social studies	X						
Religion				X	X		
Technology		X					

The themes in this table are not meant to be exclusive in the sense that aspects of one theme cannot fit into another. This reflects the theoretical approach of this article, the wish to see the familiarity between the different uses of the word *aesthetics*. So the comment about Thavenius's units of meaning being on different levels is just as applicable here. The meanings we have distinguished should therefore not be regarded as final categories, but rather as starting points for discussion. As was shown earlier, Lpo 94 seems to represent a discourse that regards aesthetics as something vital to human beings – an existentialist view of aesthetics in schools. Since Lpo 94 is above the syllabuses in the legal hierarchy, all these themes should be viewed in the light of this existentialist view by those trying to follow the rules. Whether or not those who wrote the syllabuses were aware of this is not for this article to speculate on, but the following presentation might help the reader to begin such an analysis.

The table shows clearly that there is a strong tendency to regard aesthetics as a *tool for value and judgement*. Crafts, home and consumer studies, maths, physical education, biology, chemistry, physics and social studies all show signs of such a discourse in their syllabuses. This is perhaps not so strange, considering the school system's focus on developing intellectual and critical abilities.

Pupils should . . . be able to use not only a knowledge of chemistry, but also aesthetic and ethical arguments on issues concerning the use of resources, pollution and recycling. (Utbildningsdepartementet 2001b, Chemistry under "Goals that pupils should have attained by the end of the ninth year in school")

This quote also illustrates another distinct tendency in the syllabuses, namely to pair the two words *ethical* and *aesthetic*. Wittgenstein (1933) argues that ethics and aesthetics are one and the same: “It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words. Ethics is transcendental. (Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same.)” (Wittgenstein 1933, proposition 6.421.) This indicates either that there is a moral quality to aesthetics: that something aesthetic must be morally good, or that the only way to judge whether something is morally good or not is whether it presents itself in an aesthetic way. The first of these two interpretations can be considered pre-Kantian (Kristeller 1951), while the other can be seen as very postmodern. Before Kant there was no art that was not good for the soul, and today Wolfgang Iser (1997) amongst others believes that people these days, when religion and ideologies are dead, make their decisions on the basis of the best tasting choice (Nielsen 1996). Aesthetics has thus become the new moral: the ground on which we base all our choices. “Today, we are living amidst an aestheticization of the real world formerly unheard of. Embellishment and styling are to be found everywhere. . . . Homo aestheticus has become the new role-model,” says Iser (1997, p. 3) in his argument to prove that aesthetics has become the most influential factor in modern people’s lives. It is impossible to say whether the makers of these syllabuses had these existentialist views or the more pre-Kantian views in mind when writing their texts, or whether it was neither, but simply a fascination with the sounds of the popular Swedish words *estetik* and *etik*<sup>9</sup> ringing together. Whatever the reason, the fact is that home and consumer studies, science studies, biology, chemistry, physics, social studies and crafts use these words as a pair.

Four of the subjects, crafts, music, physical education and technology, represent a discourse that regards aesthetics as a *skill*. Like the former theme, this one is also well in line with what is usually taught in schools.

A positive experience of movement and rhythm is in its turn a basis for individual and group exercises, and thus promotes not only improvisational and aesthetic, but also different motor skills (Utbildningsdepartementet 2001b, Physical education and health under “Structure and nature of the subject”).

To see aesthetic awareness as a skill is well in line with the philosophical tradition of aesthetics. Especially during the 19th century, aesthetic skills were regarded as something for the gifted who possessed the *aesthetic awareness* needed to distinguish bad works of art from better.

Such views still exist though, and the influential Frank Sibley said as late as 1959 that sensitivity to good taste is rarer than other human abilities (Emt & Hermerén 1990, p. 160). Welsch (1997) gives an insight into a less romantic view of the issue of aesthetic awareness, by seeing aesthetics not as something within the human being, but as something culturally defined as a part of a whole. To be aesthetically aware, in his opinion, therefore involves having the ability to perceive and treat different inputs such as shape, intertextual elements, historical elements, sensory inputs and so forth as a whole and through them value the object in question. Whether or not this ability is something we are born with and to what extent it can be acquired by training remain open questions, however. This view fits in quite well with Bourdieu's perception of art as being culturally defined, and of aesthetic skills as really nothing other than the ability to recognize what society has defined as being good art (Bourdieu 1996a).

Closely related to, and perhaps not separable from, the skill theme are the themes *experience* and *expression*.

The subject also covers the aesthetic and ethical aspects of experiences arising from contact with nature (Utbildningsdepartementet 2001b, Biology, under "Structure and nature of the subject").

Besides being representative of the view that aesthetics involves some kind of special quality of experience, this quote clearly shows that *aesthetics* is being used in quite a different sense from "the philosophy of art". Traces of Baumgarten, or what Thavenius (2004) refers to as the original Greek meaning, shine through here. According to such a view, *aesthetics* refers to sublime beauty capable of giving rise to a special kind of experience called *aesthetic experience*. Aesthetic experience is an important concept even today, but most philosophers deal with it as something only experienced through (good) art (Shusterman 1999). There is nothing in the other syllabuses that use *aesthetics* as experience which offers us any help in understanding how the syllabuses should be read regarding what distinguishes aesthetic experience from other experiences, only that it can be triggered by nature (biology), singing, playing and composing (music) and mathematical patterns (mathematics).

*Aesthetic(s)* in the sense of *expression* can be considered a kind of output of an aesthetic skill or ability, but we have chosen not to include it under the *skill* theme and to discuss it separately. In the syllabuses for music and religion, this aspect is most prominent.

The pupil uses music as a personal mode of expression when creating, and makes aesthetic reflections (Utbildningsdepartementet 2001b, Music, under “Criteria for the grade Pass with great distinction”).<sup>10</sup>

This quote shows that it is the pupil’s reflection that is considered to be aesthetic, but it is a matter of reflection on his or her musical expression. In a traditional communication model of musical composition or artistic creation in general, this theme can be seen as reflection upon the creative part of the process. An oversimplified model for communication of music could look like this:

Composer —→ Artist —→ Listener

Here the two first roles represent expression and the last one the receiver. An assumption in this article is that communication forms the basis for man’s constitution of the world. Each individual is the centre of his or her own universe, and the way we relate to others is through symbols or language (Schütz 1980). Aesthetics plays a role in this communication, no matter what meaning of the word we apply. At first sight it seems a little peculiar that the receiving and reflecting aspects of the communication should be given so much more prominence than the creative aspect. All of this is in fact interconnected, however, and producing without reflecting and perceiving is not possible in our view, since in one way or another experience forms the basis for most of our actions. Creating by *reflecting* aesthetically can therefore be thought of as one way of communicating aesthetic *reflections* upon aesthetic *experiences*, which constitute a foundation or *knowledge* for making *judgements* on the aesthetic *value* of something. Another interesting thing shown by this quotation is the fact that this is a criterion for grading pupils. To achieve the highest grade in music, the pupil has to be able to show that he or she makes “aesthetic reflections”. That also means that the teacher has to give opportunities in lessons for pupils to express these reflections, which implies that the teacher has to be conscious of what *aesthetic(s)* means – how else can he or she grade the pupil?

This leads us to the theme of *knowledge*, which in this discussion appears as the last theme represented in more than one syllabus. Knowledge can be seen both as a premise for the quality of aesthetic experience, expression and judgement, and as an outcome of the same, depending on our view of knowledge. In this article, knowledge is seen as something more than what we know intellectually – it also involves what is commonly called *know-how* - the cunningness or skilfulness

required to perform some action. In the subject religion there is an attempt to distinguish between different kinds of knowledge:

Aesthetic expressions and symbols constitute an important part of religion and are included in the subject. Interpretation and experience of music, art, rites and ceremonial occasions are a complement to more theoretical knowledge (Utbildningsdepartementet 2001b, Religion, under “Structure and nature of the subject”).

What distinguishes aesthetic knowledge from theoretical knowledge is an interesting subject for discussion. Is there a special knowledge regarding all the things we have characterized as defining aesthetic(s)? In our opinion there is no way we can distinguish different kinds of knowledge since, if they actually exist, they will be intertwined and interrelated to the extent that there is no usable way to view them as separate. However, there seems to have been a trend in schools especially, but also in the wider popular science debate, to embrace Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligence theory (Gardner 1993). He does not talk about aesthetic intelligence (but does refer to a musical intelligence), but even so this kind of thinking seems to be gaining growing acceptance, and might be what shines through in the syllabus for religion. There is no doubt that aesthetics can be a part of knowledge, but it is hard to see any advantage in separating different kinds of knowledge and comparing them as if they were not part of the same sum of knowledge. If they were not, then how would we explain the similarity in use, and yet clearly different meanings, of the word *aesthetic(s)*?

Wittgenstein (1960) once more comes to our rescue: It is not the differences or the specifics that define a word, it is the familiarities between meanings. Some words, he said, have diversity in meanings in use which slide over into each other and are recognizable, but not really distinguishable as separate units. This is how it is with the word *aesthetics*.

The last two themes are found only in the syllabus for art, and are of a slightly different character from the others.

As a result of its aesthetic and communicative nature, the subject can contribute to promoting the school as a cultural environment . . . (Utbildningsdepartementet 2001b, Art, under “Aim of the subject and its role in education”).

Aesthetics as a secondary tool is a discourse we have found to be fairly common in thinking about music as a subject in schools in

Norway (Thorgeresen 2003). This means that it is music's usefulness for other skills or subjects rather than the actual music taught that forms the basis of the argument for teaching the subject. In this case, it is to promote the school's image in society as something valued that gives status, namely a cultural environment.

## Final words

What kind of a guideline regarding aesthetics is provided in Lpo 94 and the national syllabuses? When pupils have to engage in aesthetic reflection to achieve the highest grade in music, does this mean that in that subject pupils should be focusing on the beauty of music, the performance and interpretative aspect, the expressionist or the communicative aspect, whether it can be considered art, or how it gives a certain kind of experience which is existentially significant? And how can the teacher evaluate this or even bring it into the classroom? How is a chemistry or maths teacher supposed to integrate aesthetics into his or her teaching? In what way is a teacher supposed to interpret the use of the word in the documents when this article has shown that the *aesthetics* can mean so many things? Is it a matter of the "philosophy of good art", the experience of beauty, reflectiveness regarding taste, a distinct and rewarding way for pupils to express their inner self, the existentialist view of aesthetics as the premise for all construction of truth, or does it simply mean "pretty"? With only the texts at hand, we can merely speculate as to what their authors meant by using the word in these particular subjects and not in others. And what about the other subjects, the ones which do not use the word *aesthetics* in their syllabuses, like Swedish and English? Are the syllabuses as a whole to be interpreted to mean that these subjects should involve less aesthetics than for example physics and technology, which do use the word? It is obvious to us that there are differences in how the authors of the different texts have interpreted *aesthetics*. This is not necessarily a problem, if the idea behind using a term which has such a diversity of interpretations is to empower the individual teacher and local discourses to make use of their particular knowledge and, within the broad understanding of the word, to let the teachers do what they feel is appropriate. If this is the case, the point of having these documents as legally binding measures to ensure equal education for all Swedish children is dubious. Depending on the purpose of the curriculum, and how the Swedish school authorities want these documents to serve as real guidelines in teachers' work, it could be important to be aware that *aesthetics*, along with other words, is interpreted and used in a wide range of

meanings. If those who draft these legal documents want one specific interpretation of aesthetics to be more prominent than others in schools, they must provide a stipulative definition of the word or make sure that everyone involved in writing the curriculum has the same understanding of it.

#### Notes

1. Or members of a society, in plain English.
2. Note that Shusterman's article is about aesthetic *experience*, but since in our opinion experience is the platform on which the whole concept of aesthetics rests, we find this to be applicable to this general outline.
3. Thavenius (2004) borrows the first four of these meanings from Nielsen (1996), who actually only devotes one paragraph to this question, and his outline is not intended as a full exploration of the different meanings of *aesthetics*. However, we find it interesting enough to form a basis for discussion.
4. Of these 23 syllabuses, only 21 are for individual subjects taught in schools. The other two are general syllabuses for *science studies*, consisting of physics, chemistry and biology (individual syllabuses for which all use the word *aesthetics*), and *social studies*, consisting of geography, history, religion and civics (here only the specific syllabus for religion uses *aesthetics*). It could therefore be argued that civics, geography and history have an obligation to relate to *aesthetics* even though their own syllabuses do not use the term, but this is not an important consideration in the present article, since the aim here is to discuss the different meanings presented and not which subjects are involved. Considering that Lpo 94 uses the word, all subjects are in any case obliged to relate to *aesthetics*.
5. This syllabus covers biology, chemistry and physics, which have their own syllabuses as well.
6. Technology only uses the word in the Swedish version, since the English translation omits the section "Evaluation, criteria for grades".
7. These are presented without any ranking in terms of importance. The ones with most hits are listed first, but this should not be taken to mean that they are the most important. This is not a quantitative analysis.
8. Subjects are listed in the order they appear in Utbildningsdepartementet 2001a.
9. *Estetik* is the Swedish word for "aesthetics", *etik* the word for "ethics".
10. Since the grade criteria are not translated in our sources, this quote is given in our own translation.



## References

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