Marja-Leena Bilund & Sirpa Svahn-Kumpulainen

From the joy of teaching to the joy of learning – using duo teaching as a springboard

The starting point for this paper is the notion that if teachers cannot find joy in their work, then they will find it difficult to inspire their pupils with a joy in learning. Teachers need to know themselves and to find joy in life. This means setting out on a voyage in the deep waters of their lives – not an easy journey by any means, but it is particularly important for those working with other people to find peace and happiness within themselves. An unconscious dissatisfaction with one's own life can easily result in outbursts of bad temper towards the children – and there are plenty of examples of that to be had. Our philosophy is summed up well in the words of Freire (1972) that dialogue is a matter of perceiving the world, of creating and re-creating. It is a process of consenting to see oneself as being the same as others, of giving up the role of possessing superior knowledge. We should be prepared to support each other in the belief that people have a capacity for changing themselves and things around them. Working together has for us been an important part of this process of self-change, both as people and as teachers. The dialogue that follows will deal with things that have proved to be important on our path from the joy of teaching to the joy of learning.

From the teacher in the classroom next door to duo teaching

The journey is deep and you will lose your way if you try to swallow it without chewing …(Four Roses)

These words provide an apt description of our journey as teachers. It is always difficult to swallow things without chewing them first. It is important, however, to perceive opportunities where others can only see problems, to step forward boldly at times when others tire and are left standing.

After a few years of working as teachers, we both came independently to the conclusion that some kind of change was needed. There had to be some other way of doing this work. We had gained "a licence to teach" but the resources it gave us were no longer sufficient. What united us was the experience that our teaching failed to connect with the children. We taught, i.e. went through the textbooks, from one lesson to the next according to the instructions given at training college, but there was no joy of learning to be seen in the children's eyes, more a sense of obligation.

Marja-Leena:

“I remember when I started in my first job that the most essential thing was to give out the right exercise books for each subject, large or small, with lines or squares. And I remember vividly how I would begin a lesson – ‘get into straight lines, open your books at page 36...’

I realized during the first year that the system didn’t work. Some of the children had done all the exercises within five minutes, while others still hadn’t found their pencil cases! What really made me stop and think was one girl – let’s call her Tiina – who was different from the others. She had never done her homework, and one day she had a fit of temper and began to run wild, ripping the other children’s papers to shreds and tipping desks over. It was then that I learned that she had previously been at a hospital school. I can’t remember what happened after that, but she wasn’t in my class for very long. I remember Mika, too, a small, shy little boy with tousled hair. His mother drank, and as Mika didn’t do very well at school she would sometimes phone about it when she was drunk. “I’ll teach him myself,” she would say.

I often think of those exercise books and those children who were all mixed up. It was those children who set me thinking. There must be another way, some way in which Tiina and Mika can feel the joy of doing something right – at least at school.”

Sirpa:

”When I began my first day working at what I was told was the best school in the town, the classroom full of first-graders looked at me and asked, ”Are you Chinese?” I was enthusiastic about teaching, but the theatre that was just next door captivated me and I began to develop an interest in puppets, puppet theatres and the building of scenery for them. This was my first great artistic project. I worked alone. There were many gifted children in my class, and many who were just different. I had to find a new desk for one boy, Kalle, because he had so many important papers, drawings and notes that he would never have been able to file them all away otherwise. Other people saw in him only a child who ate badly, but I realized that he was a rather sensitive little boy. He eventually became the manager of a printing works. Some of my children forged ahead in their various subjects at their own pace, and in the fifth grade I let some of them go on to sixth-grade topics in history. When the other teachers asked me in horror whether you were allowed to do that, I replied, ‘Who’s going to stop me?’”

Marja-Leena:

“During my first year in teaching, in the late 1980s, we visited Hakala School in Hyvinkää, which was one of the pioneers of media education and had a TV studio and produced its own news bulletins. We went into one classroom and spoke with the teacher, a woman who let the children plan their own work. That

visit convinced me that teaching could take place differently. I remember that after that visit I re-planned my whole timetable so as to have double lessons in as many subjects as possible. Then I could arrange more time for the children to work together. I did this quite secretly, without telling my colleagues, as there was no open discussion about the innovative patterns of teaching that we had seen at Hakala. For me, it was the first step on a new road, and my intuition told me it was the right road."

Sirpa:

"I changed schools after five years, and that was when I met Marja-Leena, who I was to work with, and came to appreciate her unflagging belief in teaching and in the possibilities for change. I myself was more concerned with the liberating power of knowledge and its role as a source of understanding."

Marja-Leena:

"It was by chance that we ended up at the same school in the early 1990s, but that was the beginning of two quite different teachers' joint journey towards a new kind of teacherhood. We soon realized when discussing things and doing things together that we had similar ideas about teaching. We had both experimented in various ways and had found that the children worked differently from before. You could see their enthusiasm. So we began between us to consider the chances of implementing a form of teaching that would be flexible and would reach out to the children as individuals. We felt that the school system, being stiff and slow to adapt to pressures for change, was not challenging enough. We were not content with teachers' meetings to decide on mealtime and breaktime supervision lists, times for playing indoor hockey in the school hall or the programme of Christmas entertainments."

We decided to continue our studies and gather more information on different ways of teaching. There had to be others in the world who were wrestling with the same questions. One of us set out to study the Montessori method and the other education through art, but important parts of the process throughout were the dialogue between us as two teachers and our roles in developing our own work. We had noticed that we could develop our professional thinking and knowhow together, each supporting the other. The reason for undertaking this was a desire to develop our own teaching so that we could make allowances for different types of pupils and different styles of learning. We wanted to find a manner of teaching that allowed every child to experience success in something and feel accepted by the group. It was in connection with our studying that we found a name for our way of working together as teachers; we had taken the first steps towards duo teaching (Bilund & Svahn-Kumpulainen, 2005).

An important part in this empowerment process (Perkins & Zimmer, 1995) was played by our habit of working together as a team (Wellins et al., 1991, Holpp, 1993). If you like, duo teaching was our alternative to teamwork, which seldom functions properly. In our experience teamwork in schools is usually arranged

by a small steering group that claims in effect to think for the others without taking account of their personalities, specialized knowledge or motivation. This kind of teamwork creates problems, and people are not prepared to commit themselves to it. We feel that teachers are heard in their schools but not listened to. It is a way of working that ignores the significance of the teacher's inner motivation (Sennet, 2002), so that the teamwork becomes superficial and communication becomes more important than content. It often seems that people want to bring the discussion to an end as soon as possible because they have more pressing things to talk about.

How is it, then, that our collaboration as a duo has worked so well and achieved such good results? The truth is that we have gone through many stages in this work, from pair formation through states of agitation to efficient cooperation, and the process has taken years to complete. Our colleagues have tried, consciously or unconsciously, to sow the seeds of dissention between us by their comments on what we have done or left undone, or by praising one of us and criticizing the other. Indeed, we teachers seem to have the habit of wondering at our colleagues' endeavours behind their backs. The head teacher, too, was liable to make contradictory remarks about us and our working together. We believe from experience that the head teacher occupies a crucial position when it comes to developing the working community, and that this requires a command of human relations and pedagogical principles as well as administration. The head teacher should be a well-educated and broad-minded person, so that the working community will indeed develop and not stumble into internal conflicts. It is always the job of a superior to see the potential that his or her subordinates possess.

We have now come to the stage in our careers as teachers where we should stand back and examine our work from the viewpoint of professional growth and through the eyes of a researcher. As Katariina Sulonen (2004) points out, it is by boldly questioning the teaching that is given and adapting it where necessary that every teacher can gather strength for the work and manage to develop new enthusiasm for it and empathy for the pupils. We would like to examine our work, as individuals, researchers, a team and a duo. It may be that our experiences will give others something to think about.

We will concentrate on the main topics that we have come up against in our work. We wish to examine our own growth as teachers and our own experiences of working together and developing teaching methods. What should our interpretation of the curriculum be so that we can support children and young people living in a constantly changing world in their efforts to find a sense of confidence and initiative of their own? How are we facing up to the challenges of difference, entrepreneurship and education through art in our work?

Our ideas are grounded in the post-modern perspective of Efland et al. (1998) and Lyotard (1985,1989), in which everyone has the right to his own interpretation and narrative. We have often thought in our research work about

how to examine teaching in a way that will allow the past and the present to confront each other. Should we be more vociferous in our questioning of power and authority in the educational world?

Our own empowerment and cooperation has helped us to retain our joy in our work, or at least to rediscover it over and over again. Varila and Lehtosaari (2001) note that the acquiring of a joy in one's work is usually a long, slow cognitive process, and we have certainly learned this over the years. Nicola Cuomo (2007), on the other hand, speaks of feelings of fear and guilt experienced by teachers who set out to bring about change, and we would claim that we have been able to overcome these through the dialogue that we have kept up. We have also thought a great deal about the joy of learning as experienced by the children. Where does it come from? Our deliberations on this point have ranged over the significance of such things as education through art, internal entrepreneurship, differences between learners, networking and choices of teaching methods, but how, exactly, are these concepts connected with the joy of learning?

Perhaps I'll be an elephant when I grow up

Sirpa:

"When I was small we had nothing to draw or paint with at home. We were a working class family where everything was in short supply. But we had forests in which we could run around and do battle. On the other hand, I was, and still am, the sort of person who sees things – and problems – in terms of pictures and colours, and so the producing of pictures was rather the same kind of experience for me as it has been for my pupils.

Elina was artistically an extremely talented pupil. It was only that she could never remember the names of her classmates and lived very much in a world of pieces of paper. She would concentrate on looking at things, and when the process of drawing them was over she would hand the papers in to me and forget about them. They no longer interested her. The act of creating a work of art was an end in itself. It is only us adults who worry about framing pictures, preserving them and putting masterworks on show for future generations, or auctioning them off when the artists have died. Only we are interested in building up stores of pictures."

Marja-Leena:

"Kalle was a silent, reserved boy who was teased by the other boys because of his prominent teeth. He found maths difficult but was an expert when it came to drawing. He knew intuitively how to use a pencil and how to use shading to create depth in a sketch. In time the other pupils came to admire Kalle's drawing ability and he was highly sought-after as an advisor when we were preparing work for the local art museum. Now he was part of the gang."

We have often considered what means we have available to support growth and development in our children and young people, as we are between us united in our enthusiasm for teaching, education through art and the world around us. We are at our best when we are thinking up new ideas for projects that will make use of the whole field represented by the Web and education through art in general.

It was when we were working on our first joint Genesis project, setting out from the notion of human existence, that we began to consider the limitless opportunities for using art as a means of promoting learning. The children were working together on ways of representing the ideas of life and death. Where do we come from and where are we going? Maria Montessori regards the hands as tools placed at the disposal of the brain, and we noted in the course of the project that as the children worked on the various items they would talk amongst themselves about the themes involved. When we were making death masks they would talk about death, much more rationally than we adults do, because our emotions always rise to the surface when we are dealing with a subject like that. ”

This led us to think about learning in a wider sense. How does it really come about? How do children’s own experiences help them in this process? How can art help them to think? Given full rein, education through art can help children to plans things, put their plans into effect, take risks and tolerate uncertainties, but how is this reflected in their ways of working? How can education through art train them to be critical, to be active citizens? How, indeed, can art education with all its ramifications occupy a central place in this process?

”Standing among the children’s magnificent productions with a feeling of considerable satisfaction after the opening of the exhibition, I asked one little girl, “Well, Mari, what do you want to be when you grow up.” Mari thought for a moment and then answered, “I think I’ll be an elephant.”

Experiences with art projects

The theoreticians of education through art are of the opinion that changes have taken place in the teaching of matters connected with cultural differences in the course of the post-modern era. Where modern education in this sense consisted of explaining different genres and going through a panorama of local, ethnic and popular styles, the emphasis in post-modern times has been on differences and the multi-level interpretation of culturally bound means of expression. This has turned minority cultures into phenomena in their own right and made them essential parts of art education. In the same way, subcultures within society have been studied on a par with others (Puurula 1999.).

In our experience the notion of art education is often interpreted too narrowly, without stopping to consider what opportunities can present themselves if we

are prepared to think of it in terms of the use of art to support learning processes in general. One question that frequently arises when working with children and young people concerns quite simply the nature of art: What is art? Who can be an artist? What is its purpose? What use is there in it?

Sirpa:

“Teemu came up to me in a first grade class after he had been painting intensively for two hours and asked, ‘Teacher, what do you think of this? Is it good?’ The ragged cuffs of his shirtsleeves were soaked in paint and a pot of water had tipped over on his desk and spilled through a crack onto his books below, but the piece of paper he had in his hand was full of action and effort. The cat he had painted was in such a hurry that it had to have ten sturdy legs, he explained. I asked him in turn “What do you think of it?” Teemu looked at it and said, with no ‘s’ sound because of his missing front teeth, ‘I think it’s quite good.’”

Let the children try out their wings

Art can be a tool for children, with no special glamour or significance attached to it. It is a means by which they can express themselves in a very personal way. Art knows no restrictions in the hands of children – or when it comes from the hands of children. It is as straightforward as going down a snowy hill on a toboggan. It is the adults who spoil everything. The doodlings that you find in the margins of books are indications of something, sudden inspirations, ways of dealing with tiresome things, efforts at keeping up the thinking process, or aids to concentration. Or else they are just reasons for giving the children detentions – for drawing in school textbooks!

I remember that when we were doing our first Genesis project the children were just as excited as we were that their work was going to be exhibited at the Art Museum in Mikkeli, and their parents were proud of them for it and came there in large numbers to see the exhibition. It was one of the most successful events of the year for the Art Museum, and its walls were full of pictures and stories. (http://verdi.koulukanava.fi/kkanava/kuvataide.htm)

Why are art museums so aloof and distant from ordinary people? Why can’t we look on them as places we visit to gain new experiences, experiences from which we can learn something and derive strength for living our own lives? But experiences don’t arise without action. What idea do children and young people have of art? What sort of place would an art museum be if they could have their way?

There are many concepts that are difficult to define, however. Art is valued as something that arises ‘from within’. It has a specific purpose of its own, a nature and significance that can be attributed just as well to the work of art, the act of appreciating it or the artist who produced it, or to a combination of all of these

(Dickie, 1984). Dickie regards art as a social phenomenon. But why, in that case, are our experiences of art museums anything but social?

Concepts of art are constantly being proposed and developed, in spite of the fact that the people proposing them are usually well aware that art is difficult to define. This problem is openly acknowledged within post-modern art education, which recognizes the role of language in the construction of reality, the link between knowledge and power and the need to preserve small narratives regarding art and art education alongside the large ones, because no one has it in their power to define the truth about art (Efland 1998).

Work in art education with children frequently lays its principal emphasis on the process involved. An adult will often work in a more conscious manner, but children immerse themselves in their task with passionate enthusiasm, and may well lose interest in the product altogether once it is finished. They may not even want to take it away with them; it has served its purpose. One stage in the work of experiential art education has come to an end and it is time to begin a new process. New experiences and acts of observation lie ahead, and opportunities for deliberating over new things in the light of these observations. Children are usually aware of what interests them and actively set about their next task. They are accustomed to gathering new material from their moments of art education and are ready to go on creating new ideas.

We were delighted with the results. Our work was accepted by the Art Museum, which indicated that our theme of ‘The Story of Creation’ fitted in well with their current accent on the Kalevala. An exhibition in Mikkeli Art Museum! Something new that would take us out of the classroom! Now we were ready to put the work of every one of our children on show.

Sirpa:

“I felt as if a golden egg had fallen into our lap. The children’s work was going to an art gallery. We had to keep this to ourselves so as not to spoil the whole business. Truly a golden egg!”

I will always remember how excited we were at having established cooperation with the art museum. It was something that we had not dared even to dream of earlier. Again we had set out largely on the strength of our own intuition, and we could never have guessed what magnificent projects we could take on jointly with the museum.

Learning was no longer confined within the four walls of the school but centred around contacts with the surrounding community, both physical ones and virtual ones via the Web.

In the end we have had a lot of cooperation with Mikkeli Art Museum. We were able to initiate a new form of collaboration between different branches of the city council’s cultural affairs administration, in the form of joint workshops, and we

have aimed at lowering the threshold for children, young people, the handicapped and others to visit the museum and experience art as one aspect of normal human existence and as a means of enhancing the quality of life.

One classroom assistant said when she came to the art museum for the first time that she had always looked on the whole institution as a dead letter, a place where elegant ladies strolled from one painting to next with a glass of champagne in their hand. I must say that my childhood experiences were much the same, that museums of all kinds were boring places that one would never go to voluntarily. You have to go round them in a line and keep quiet. In fact we never even went to such places with the school.

Our joint projects with the Art Museum were very successful, so successful, in fact, that we began to consider with the director, Anna-Maria Larikka, the possibility of setting up workshop groups there. Again we were very excited at the idea, as we wanted to turn the museum into a place where children could find something stimulating and gain personal experiences of producing art. We wanted to allow them to be artists for a moment and to rejoice in the idea of everyone being able to come and look and then do things for themselves. All the products were rewarded by inclusion in the exhibition, and none any more or less than the others.

Such artistic and aesthetic experiences are at their best dialogues in which the pupils' artistic experiences and the results emerging from them can be linked together (Sava 1993, 2000). As John Falk and Lynn Dierking (1992) maintain, experiences of museums are influenced by personal, social and physical factors. It was important for us to break down the boundaries in the case of the museum and lower the threshold for the children and young people to step inside, to allow them experiences and realizations of what they themselves had created.

Perhaps the most memorable thing about the opening of the exhibition was Liisa's cry of delight, "But now we are artists!"

Can I have a try?

Marja-Leena:

"I grew up in a family that ran a small business, and I have been used to working since I was twelve. It was quite common for children to help their parents with the farm work when I was a child, and we had a strawberry farm, and still do as a matter of fact, which just meant that the work and its rhythm were rather different from those on an ordinary farm. It was all squeezed into the short period from May to August, and it was important to take decisions quickly and act upon them at once. Everything depended on the weather, and it was necessary to put up with living in a constant state of uncertainty. There were five of us girls, and our father taught us the work of the farm at an early

age. He believed that children and young people are able to look after things if only they are given the chance to do so. I was allowed to use a rifle, to drive a tractor, to sell the strawberries and to follow tracks. I was proud of what I could do, and sometimes I had to be the boss for a large number of workers!

Going to school came as quite a shock for me. I remember many times standing still and thinking over what I had said or done. I did my work quickly and had plenty of time for all sorts of other things. Once I went swimming in the small lake next to the school, and the teacher was terribly angry. I don't know why, because I had been swimming with my friends when I wanted all my life.

I remember how unhappy I was when the English teacher made me stand in a 'ring of shame' that she had drawn on the floor with chalk. I didn't know anything and was no use at school. I thought I must be stupid, as I didn't get good marks. No one had told the teacher that I never really did my homework. I would toss my satchel into a corner when I came home from school and pick it up from there the following morning. People in the countryside didn't worry much about school. Other things were more important."

Sirpa:

"There were two of us, Heli Hiltunen and myself. Heli became a professional artist and I went into teaching. But school was a time of shameful humiliation. I always knew the fastest route for going to school, or rather for coming out again, and Heli knew at what we could start running out. It was the teacher's job to instil obedience in the pupils in any way she could. The wages of sin was death! We all knew, however, who was teased most in the class, and the teacher took part in this. Fortunately we were never teased, but we were the smallest in the class and our little hearts were often filled with the dreariness of life, far too often, in fact, and full to the brim. Our red rubber boots failed to keep our feet warm on the slippery forest track as we went back and forth to school in the winter, eating the snowballs that had stuck to our mittens as we went. We helped each other and were sometimes afraid, but we decided that we would be something one day. In the summer we would sell flowers to the neighbours; why did they laugh at us so?"

Marja-Leena:

"The messages I received from home and school were so different. At home I was quick-witted and sharp and knew how to look after things when needed. I was encouraged to do things and to try things. At school, though, all I ever heard was that I was bad and useless. I didn't behave like the other girls; I was too loud-mouthed, too outspoken and too boyish. The very characteristics that I was admired and praised for at home were regarded as bad and unsuitable behaviour at school.

I have noticed in my work that a child can easily be appreciated quite differently at home and at school. What influence do the surroundings have on learning?

What can a school do to encourage and motivate its pupils? Is it possible for the school system to promote an attitude of helplessness, to suppress the child's desire to do things and try things? What factors influence the desire to do things and try things? And what is the relative significance of school and home in this process?"

It must be clear from this that our experiences as schoolchildren have been in the background, guiding our work as teachers. We do no wish to continue the tradition of humiliating pupils, but rather we would like to look for the good points in them, as all children know what they are bad at without being told. On the other hand, they need to receive positive feedback hundreds of times before they are convinced that they are good at something. Somehow the fear of making mistakes is so ingrained in us, both adults and children, that we have to work hard all the time to dispel that fear. Girls in particular need a lot of support and encouragement. How can the school system help the girls forward? And why are there still so many more men in management positions?

The learning of the correct attributes is one part of a successful learning process, and the altering of these in the desired direction is one of the aims of learning in terms of modern theory (Weiner 1972). But what is the significance of the relation between the individual and the environment in which learning takes place?

Arguing from the viewpoint of social learning theory, Gibb and Ritchie (1982) emphasize the importance of an enterprise culture and a learning environment that favours business acumen. What are the factors that support children and young people in developing towards entrepreneurship in the classroom? The human being has a natural desire to learn and develop, but how can this best be supported? It is in this connection that the term 'intrapreneur' coined by Gifford Pinchot (1985) comes into its own. How can one instil a sense of intrapreneurship in people to stir them into action?

There was an article in the economic journal Fakta a while ago that discussed the capabilities that young people need to learn at school in order to cope in our post-modern society. How can they be guided towards an entrepreneurial way of thinking in the context of their own schooling? Are they given the chance to influence what they do at school, to draw on their experiences or to plan, implement and evaluate their own learning process? Is the school system at a standstill in spite of all the reforms that have taken place?

The curriculum maintains in glowing terms that young people should be encouraged to show initiative, educated for entrepreneurship. What is this initiative that the teacher should be looking for? And do the pupils' and teacher's views on initiative or entrepreneurship actually coincide? In our experience many of the same regularities hold good for entrepreneurship whether viewed by children, young people or adults. The economic life of the country needs people who are capable of thinking, making plans, implementing them and evaluating the outcomes. It needs people with courage and the ability to take

calculated risks, and the ability to make mistakes and try again without being ashamed of having failed. It is important to understand that very often there are as many answers as there are people asking the questions. In our opinion the issue is not education for entrepreneurship but people's attitude towards work and life itself.

We have done a lot of project work with children and have seen that subjects which impinge on the children's own world inspire them most. Art education is an excellent way of setting out on the road towards 'intrapreneurship'.

Marja-Leena:

"The children were especially taken with our 'Give me a Hug' project, because they could do things that second-graders love doing – play with dolls and soft toys just as the fancy took them. They created father figures, warrior figures and animal figures, and were very excited when they could plan it all and carrying it out themselves. The case that stuck in our minds was that of Kaija and her 'self-portrait doll', the idea of which was to produce an image of herself when younger and give it her own old clothes to wear and her old toys to play with. Kaija's doll was called Jani, and she carried it everywhere with her. As this was part of an EU project and the dolls were to be circulated to different countries, she even had a passport photograph taken for Jani, but in the end she was unable to give her doll permission to travel and it had to stay at home. Kaija even made a photo album of Jani's daily activities, and the whole group of girls who had made self-image dolls even produced a film of them together in English, 'Babies'. It was an amazing achievement for children in the second grade who couldn't even read the language yet! With Jani's help Kaija was able to discover new skills, through which she was able to find her own place in the class. For the first time she had friends among the other girls."

A schools television programme was also made about that project, and the project also helped us to realize just how well children can work unsupervised, on their own and in groups, if they are given the chance. They certainly tried! It showed us how education through art can serve as a bridge between the subjects taught at school, so that learning becomes an integral process and the subjects go hand in hand rather than forming a set of separate bits.

Ulla Hytti (2001) sums up very well in her report just the same things as we encountered in our classwork and art project: the enormous importance of learning by doing, experiential learning and the creation of an encouraging atmosphere of curiosity (Kolb,1984). The pupils can be encouraged to adopt an enquiring attitude within the learning process, such that the traditional role of the teacher can be exchanged for that of a guide or mentor (Bilund & Svahn-Kumpulainen, 2005)

Antti Paasio (2005) speaks of the future need for people with self-confidence, initiative and vision who are creative, prepared to take risks and internally motivated to act as experts, able to become enthusiastic about things and to

inspire enthusiasm in others. How can schools support the growth of the individual and the emergence of intrapreneurship? We believe from our experiences that art education can provide one starting point for this.

Facing up to one's fears

We were walking through the corridors of a school. "We stopped in front of some work that the children had done, and gazed at 25 identical ducks, some with blue webbed feet and some with red. 'Creativity in the comprehensive school,' we observed, and went on our way down the grey corridor." We wondered for a moment how many tears were shed over those ducks when mistakes were made in the course of cutting them out. Art education can avoid experiences of failure of that kind, and we thought that perhaps we should suggest that cut-out exercises should be kept apart from art. Our own classroom contained 40 joyful angels – all different – cut out of newspaper, with their crowns on one side and their eyes not necessarily matching, but with smiles on their faces. We proudly showed these to the other teachers. "Lovely crumpled heaps," was the comment from one experienced teacher. We gave each other a consoling look...

Kari Uusikylä (2003) emphasizes that the teacher's job is to encourage the children to do things and create suitable conditions for them. The children themselves will have the skills and the ideas; all that is needed is to bring these to the surface. We have seen in our work how the children's own enthusiasm can make the subject matter come to life and gain in depth. In the course of our projects the children have produced pictures, poems, stories, films, music, dances, movement and daydreams; all we have done is give them the framework, the opportunities and the equipment. They transformed the projects into something in their own likeness. We have seen in our own work that learning sets out from the learners' personal experiences. The crucial element is reflective observation, which is in many cases transformed into abstract conceptualization only through positive activity.

Marja-Leena:

"The 'Face your Fears' project demonstrated this to us in a very practical sense. We were discussing the fears that children have, and had considered fears of the dark, of war, of being alone etc. Then we took to discussing how fear is generated in films, for instance, and how these films affect us. The children set out to produce a thriller film in the school basement, producing the sound-track themselves, and had to think how they were going to inspire fear. The best idea was when one child exclaimed, 'Look, if we use different music here it doesn't seem frightening at all any longer!' This child had discovered by experience that fear can be induced artificially. The children were delighted with this discovery. The important thing with fear is to be able to face up to your fears and deal with them. I remember Ulla suddenly realizing in an adventure school exercise that she was able to climb along a track that was high above the ground, 'Look,

Teacher, I'm not nearly so frightened of climbing any longer!' I will always remember the joy and rapture on her face, the joy of succeeding in something. I remember, too, how happy I was for her."

There are also many Montessori ideas to be found in our work. Maria Montessori (1916/1991, 1918/1991, 1948, 1994) spoke of children's development as a series of sensitivity periods. Each child has its own natural rhythm of development which cannot be speeded up. Forms and techniques cannot be taught until the children have the capacity to accept them. But she did maintain that children can be guided towards perceiving and experiencing the world around them with their senses.

Having become acquainted with the educational philosophy of Dewey (1938, 1929/1999), we realized that he has many ideas in common with Montessori. Both wrote about the 'learning by doing' method, in which a person can gain knowledge only through action and experience, and both spoke of the importance of the senses and being skilled with one's hands as a basis for development, and of considering the child as a whole person (cf. Rauhala, 1990). Both believed in the infinite potential to be found in a child. On the other hand, Dewey criticized Montessori's ready-planned environment and didactic learning aids, which he claimed were too dominant and restricted the child's activity. Montessori believed in cognitive, reality-based learning in an environment that is planned in a certain way, while Dewey emphasized freedom of learning at the emotional and functional levels (Hainstock 1986). In the opinion of Elliot Eisner (1979, 1988), creativity, understanding and decision-making skills require as much if not more effort than skills that call only for the observing of rules.

Inspired by our studies, we have developed our own way of teaching which represents a combination of the ideas of theoreticians ranging from Montessori to Eisner. We look on it as a 'post-mix model', which does not reject earlier notions but links them in with new ones.

We feel that excessive rules and limitations are liable to stifle independent thinking and prevent pupils from taking responsibility for what they are doing. Schoolchildren are apt to be afraid of the punishment that will result from breaking the rules, and conclude that it is safer to do what they are told than to think independently. Our school communities seem to be unfortunately detached from the surrounding society, and the same is true of us teachers. The fear of making mistakes prevents us from setting out on new paths of our own, and it is this fear that takes the joy out of teaching. And how can the children experience the joy of learning if their teacher fails to experience any joy in teaching?

Help me to do it myself

One particularly challenging area for us when setting out to develop our own work was coping with differences between learners and differences in styles of learning. Our own junior school experiences certainly did not bring us any joy in learning.

Marja-Leena:

”I was too lively, noisy and boyish, and the teacher simply didn’t know what to do with me. She made it quite clear that I was a bad pupil because I wouldn’t fit in with the rest. I was happiest when I was swimming, or at Kettuvuori, a hill where we had our secret hide-out. So as a teacher I have always paid special attention to the pupils who are different, the lively ones and the slow learners, the silent children and the noisy ones. I don’t look on them as bad pupils or hopeless cases. When I come up against new children I try to form an overall picture of them. I watch and listen, but I don’t base my picture on what others say about them. My own junior school teacher believed that I would never manage at school, and that it would be best for me to choose the shortest course in each subject. Fortunately I had my parents beside me, who knew me better! What a long time it has taken for those wounds inflicted by my teachers to heal!”

Sirpa (at 9 years of age):

“I was very excited when at last I got the children’s comics I wanted: Wings, Buffalo Bill and The Phantom. I got a pair of real jeans, too, so I didn’t feel that I was so different from the others. I would lie on the sweet-smelling grass in my hiding place in the woods for hours on end reading these comics. I was very happy there, and when I had finished reading I would often sing through the whole of the standard book of popular songs from cover to cover. Being an outsider didn’t worry me as a child, only when I grew up. It was then that I began looking at aspects of my work from the outside, as it were, and then it felt as if I was different, because I was always seeing alternative possibilities and never quite understood when I should punish pupils and what for. ‘What is so wicked about that?’ I would often think. When I was small and the teacher had treated me unfairly, my mother used to say, “That’s the way of the world, Sirpa,” and so I was determined that no child in my class should be left unheeded and insisted that each one was important.”

We wanted to set out in our own teaching from this notion that the children are to be accepted for what they are and that it is our job to find the strong points in every child.

We had a number of children in our classes who had medical diagnoses of Asperger syndrome, dysphasia, dyslexia or emotional disturbances, and also a number who simply suffered from restless behaviour. The heterogeneity of the group we were dealing with was quite a challenge. In those days we used to

speak of social integration, but the modern term is ‘inclusion’ – teaching pupils of all kinds together (Hautamäki et al., 2001).

In our experience the inclusion of special pupils in an ordinary class is quite possible and can even be rewarding, but the teacher does have to face challenges of quite a new kind. It is essential to be able to set these special pupils and others who are ‘different’ to work in ways that they individually find appropriate, and project work can play an important role in this, as it allows groups of children and young people to work together but each on something that he or she finds meaningful. Each one can hit on a job that makes use of his or her strengths. At the same time, the curricular objectives can be attained in a rational manner, as learning is looked on as a process in which the things to be learned all go hand in hand.

Flexible ways of working can help children and young people to learn, because they can guide each other and iron out misunderstandings straight away. The good pupils are able to reinforce their knowledge by advising the others, even in quite difficult matters (Cohen, 1994).

One of the cornerstones of the Montessori method (1918/1991, 1916/1991, 1948a, 1948b, 1949) is heterogeneity in the groups, as it is assumed from the outset that the pupils in a group will help each other. They will either be working on the same task or else they will work on tasks of their own without disturbing each other, but even in this case retaining the possibility of helping each other.

We felt that the strengths that the special children in particular possessed came to the fore better in project work and that it became easier for them to blend into the group (Bilund & Svahn-Kumpulainen 2005).

The journey forward

We are on a life-long journey towards becoming teachers, a goal which we will inevitably never reach. We have already spent more than twenty years each in growing towards this goal. All we can say is that finding joy in one’s work requires an enormous effort. It is necessary to begin by trying to understand oneself, and in this sense working alongside another person provides somebody to share experiences with and gain new perspectives from. The dialogue between us has played an important role, as also has examination of our own work (Korpinen 1996, Ojanen 1996). Teachers can develop their professional knowledge and thinking alone and/or through interaction with other teachers, and this process may be set in motion for theoretical, academic, experiential, ethical or practical reasons (Sahlberg 1998, Saloviita 2006, Skinnari 2004, Luukkainen 2005). But in any case teachers must have their own philosophy of education on which to base their methodological and pedagogical practices (Saloviita, 2007).

We feel that children and young people should be helped to believe in their right to make their own choices and trust in themselves. There are no inevitably correct answers, and in the last resort this is a question of growing up as a person and establishing control over one's own life.

In the words of Uusikylä (2003), the work of a teacher calls for pedagogical love, goodness of heart, the ability to perceive all pupils as being of value as individuals, and the acceptance of responsibility for supporting their potential for development and for helping them to find their own talents. But in addition to goodness of heart, a teacher's work calls for thinking – the reconciling of theoretical knowledge with practical circumstances in highly variable teaching situations. We have learned that listening to one's own heart requires courage and the ability to tolerate uncertainty. Our teaching experiences are just brief narratives in the lives of people, but they tell us about choices – what to emphasize, how to place things in order of importance, and what should be accepted. They tell us about networking, about the broad field of human needs and about knowledge. And they tell us that having set out on this journey, there is no turning back.

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