Childhood & Philosophy
E-ISSN: 1984-5987
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Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro
Brasil

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Childhood & Philosophy, vol. 1, núm. 2, julio-diciembre, 2005, pp. 537-554
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Maracanã, Brasil

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS CUP AND THAT DEAD SHARK? PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY WITH OBJECTS AND WORKS OF ART AND CRAFT

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Abstract:
Philosophical inquiry in the UK has taken a somewhat different route from that in the US and various parts of Europe. Practitioners in the UK tend to use a great deal of home-grown materials instead of the IAPC books. They also rely on a range of philosophical stimuli that are not, or not exclusively, based on text. Their embeddedness in the North-American educational, cultural and linguistic contexts renders the IAPC texts sometimes opaque, even perplexing, to British child readers. This paper explores possibilities of initiating 'aesthetic' inquiry, i.e. philosophical inquiry with works of art and craft and other objects, e.g. religious artefacts and everyday, found or natural objects. It investigates the differences between aesthetic and conventional text based inquiries and makes suggestions about the advantages and value of aesthetic inquiry. That stimuli other than purpose-written philosophical texts are admissible as starting points for philosophical inquiry does not automatically mean that they work the same way as texts. In conventional enquiry the (purpose-written philosophical) text is the springboard for enquiry: a vehicle, and no more than that, to convey the participants to the realm of philosophical inquiry. The text has not, or is not meant to have, intrinsic aesthetic qualities. However, a picture, a piece of music or a craft object does have a different kind of physical reality from text, as well as inescapable aesthetic qualities. These qualities necessitate an approach to the inquiry that is different from the text-based one. Whilst the literature on aesthetic inquiries has been increasing, albeit slowly, their special characteristics do not yet seem to have been subjected to systematic investigation. Since it is my contention that there are important differences between text- and non-text-based inquiries both in terms of their nature and the nature of the inquiry they generate, I hope that this paper will contribute to a discussion on these differences.

Keywords: Aesthetic inquiry; Objects; Works of art; Craft objects

Qual o significado desta xícara e daquele tubarão morto? Investigação filosófica com objetos , obras de arte e artesanato

Resumo:
A investigação filosófica com crianças na Grã Bretanha tomou um caminho diferente daquele dos EUA e de várias partes da Europa. Os que a praticam na Grã Bretanha tendem a utilizar um grande número de materiais domésticos improvisados em lugar dos livros do programa do IAPC; e lidam com uma gama de estímulos filosóficos que não são, ou não exclusivamente, centrados no texto. Uma vez que os livros do IAPC tomam por base a educação norte-americana, os seus contextos culturais e linguísticos são por vezes opacos e até impenetráveis para as crianças britânicas.

what is the meaning of this cup and that dead shark? philosophical inquiry with objects and works of art and craft

Este artigo explora as possibilidades de dar início a uma investigação 'estética', isto é, uma investigação filosófica com obras de arte e outros objetos, por exemplo, artefatos religiosos e cotidianos, objetos naturais e encontrados. O artigo pesquisa as diferenças entre as investigações, estética, por um lado e aquela convencional, baseada no texto, por outro, e faz sugestões quanto às vantagens e o valor da investigação estética. O fato de que estímulos outros que o texto filosófico sejam admissíveis como ponto de partida para a investigação filosófica, não implica que eles operem automaticamente da mesma maneira que os textos. Na investigação convencional, o texto é o trampolim para investigação: um veículo, e não mais do que isso, para transportar os participantes para o terreno da investigação filosófica. O texto não tem, ou não tem a intenção de ter, qualidades estéticas intrínsecas. No entanto, uma imagem, uma peça musical ou um objeto artesanal têm um tipo de realidade física diferente daquela do texto, bem como suas qualidades estéticas próprias. Qualidades estas que requerem uma forma de investigação diversa daquela baseada no texto.Embora a literatura sobre pesquisa estética venha aumentando, ainda que lentamente, suas características especiais ainda não parecem ter sido submetidas à pesquisa sistemática. Uma vez que defendo a posição de que há diferenças importantes entre as investigações baseadas em textos e as que deles prescindem – diferenças tanto no que se refere à sua natureza, quanto em relação à investigação que delas resulta – espero que este trabalho venha a contribuir para uma discussão sobre essas diferenças.

Palavras-chave: Investigação estética; Objetos; Obras de arte; Objetos artesanais

¿Qué significan esta taza y aquel tiburón muerto? Investigación filosófica con objetos, obras de arte y artesanías

Resumen:
La investigación filosófica con niños en Gran Bretaña tomó un camino distinto que en los EE.UU. y partes de Europa. Aquellos que la practican en el Reino Unido tienden a utilizar un gran número de materiales improvisados en lugar de libros del programa del IAPC, y se basan en una serie de estímulos filosóficos que no son, o no exclusivamente, centrados en el texto. En la medida en que los libros del IAPC tienen por referencia la educación estadounidenses, sus contextos culturales y lingüísticos son a menudo opacos e impenetrables para los niños británicos. Este artículo explora las posibilidades de iniciar una investigación "estética", es decir, una investigación filosófica con obras de arte y otros objetos, por ejemplo, objetos religiosos y objetos cotidianos, naturales y encontrados. El artículo examina las diferencias entre la investigación estética y la investigación convencional basada en el texto, y hace sugerencias en cuanto a las ventajas y el valor de la investigación estética. El hecho de que otros estímulos que no el texto filosófico sean admisibles como punto de partida para la investigación filosófica, no implica automáticamente que operan del mismo modo que los textos. En la investigación convencional, el texto es el punto de partida para la investigación: un vehículo, no más que eso, para el transporte de los participantes al campo de la investigación filosófica. El texto no tiene, o no tiene la intención de tener, calidad estética

intrínseca. Sin embargo, una imagen, una pieza de música o un objeto artesanal tienen un tipo de realidad física diferente del texto, así como sus propias cualidades estéticas. Cualidades que requieren una forma de investigación que no sea basada en el texto. Aunque la literatura sobre la investigación estética aumente, si bien que lentamente, sus características especiales no han sido todavía objeto de investigación sistemática. Una vez que defiendo la posición de que existen importantes diferencias entre las investigaciones basadas en los textos y las que renuncian a ellos - diferencias tanto respecto a su naturaleza, como en relación con el tipo de investigación que de ellas resulta - espero que este trabajo contribuya para una discusión de estas diferencias.

Palabras clave: Investigación estética; Objetos; Obras de arte; Objetos artesanales

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS CUP AND THAT DEAD SHARK? PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY WITH OBJECTS AND WORKS OF ART AND CRAFT

Sara Liptai

This paper is dedicated to Morag Macinnes
and Alison Hall, without whose encouragement
it could not have been written

Some features of PI in the UK

Philosophical inquiry (PI) in the UK has taken a somewhat different route from that in the US and various parts of Europe. Practitioners in the UK tend to use a great deal of home-grown P4C materials instead of the IAPC books. They also rely on a range of philosophical stimuli that are not, or not exclusively, based on text.

Language

One reason for this may well be the particular difficulties the British face with the IAPC texts. Whilst speakers of other languages have access to these texts through (potentially) good, idiomatic translations, British P4C-ers suffer from what G.B. Shaw referred to as the common language that separates the two sides of the Atlantic. Their embeddedness in the North-American educational, cultural and linguistic contexts renders the IAPC texts sometimes opaque, even perplexing, to British child readers[1]. They, too, need a kind of a translation of these books to be able to get past questions of language use and focus on the philosophical topics[2].

British P4C resources

Another likely reason is the wealth of British P4C materials, following

[1] It would be interesting to investigate whether, and how, text read for PI that is in a not entirely familiar idiom affects the quality or direction of the inquiry.
[2] The single - successful - attempt at adapting a Lipman-novel to British English, Roger Sutcliffe's version of Harry, has, unfortunately, long been out of print.

from the particular interests of influential P4C practitioners in Britain. By introducing pictures books - i.e. a resource that is, in principle, present in every British primary school - into the P4C canon over a decade ago, Karin Murris set in motion a trend of greatly broadening access to P4C, especially for young children[3]. Robert Fisher, widely read by teachers, has, since 1996, published several volumes of P4C resources, consisting of folk-tales, myths and legends, poems and games[4]. He has given detailed guidance to teachers on introducing inquiry in all subject areas of the primary curriculum, including physical education, art and music[5]. More recently, among others, a resource book on P4C with photography and writings about P4C in music education[6] have been added to the range of materials and approaches. It is indicative of the broad spectrum of starting points considered appropriate in P4C in Britain that in her 2001 book: Children As Philosophers, Joanna Haynes describes the starting points for philosophical enquiry as follows: "Teachers can use some text to read aloud, such as a story, poem or newspaper report. They may bring an object or play a piece of music, or show a set of photographs or a documentary film."[7]

Non-text-based inquiry

That stimuli other than purpose-written philosophical texts are admissible as starting points for PI does not automatically mean that they work the same way as texts. Whilst the literature on aesthetic inquiries has been increasing, albeit slowly, their special characteristics do not yet seem to have been subjected

[3] Murris, K. (1992) Teaching Philosophy with Picture Books London: Infonet; Murris, K. (1997) Metaphors of the Child's Mind: Teaching Philosophy to Young Children PhD University of Hull; Murris, K. and Haynes, J. (2000) Storywise: Thinking Through Stories Newport: DialogueWorks.
[4] Including Fisher, R. (1996) Stories for Thinking; (1997a) Games for Thinking; (1997b) Poems for Thinking, all by Oxford: Nash Pollock.
[5] Fisher, R. (1998, 2003) Teaching Thinking: Philosophical Enquiry in the Classroom.
[6] Andersson, Liptai, Sutton & Williams (2003) Ta(l)king Pictures: Thinking Through Photographs Birmingham: Imaginative Minds; Liptai, S. (2002) "Good Vibrations" Teaching Thinking Summer 2002 Issue 8: 24-27.
[7] Haynes, J. (2001) Children as Philosophers London: Routledge p. 21.

to systematic investigation[8]. Since it is my contention that there are important differences between text- and non-text-based inquiries both in terms of their nature and the nature of the inquiry they generate, I hope that this paper will contribute to a discussion on these differences.

The particular group of stimulus materials I will focus on comprises

1 works of art and craft, to include all the visual arts as well as music, dance and drama, although in this paper I will mostly refer to visual and musical materials

2 everyday, natural or found objects, some of which may have special significance, for example clothing that relates to religious customs.

I see some of the inquiries they generate as aesthetic inquiries, in the Kantian sense, and others as more concerned with sociological and/or psychological than purely aesthetic questions. However, in my experience, there is usually no sharp division between these areas of inquiry.

I am devoting the rest of this paper to investigating the special features of such inquiries, based on practical experience and speculation. Mention will also be made of the use of (potentially) aesthetic stimuli in a non-aesthetic context. In this paper I will not dwell on the use of poems and other artistically fashioned texts as stimuli for inquiry.

The nature of purpose-written texts

In conventional enquiry the (purpose-written philosophical) text is the springboard for enquiry: a vehicle, and no more than that, to convey the participants to the realm of PI. The text has not, or is not meant to have, intrinsic

[8] Toye, N. (1996) "On the Relationship Between Philosophy for Children and Educational Drama" if…then The Journal of Philosophical Enquiry in Education Vol (1): 37-45; Elwich, B. & Lagodzka, A. (1999) "Visions and Words: Exercises for Thinking" Thinking Vol. 14 (2) 41-47; Turgeon, W. (2001) "The Mirror of Aesthetic Education: Philosophy Looks at Art and Art Looks at Philosophy" Thinking Vol 15 (2) p. 21-31; Bosch, E. (2001) A Philosophical Approach to Contemporary Art: Looking Out Aloud in: Curnow, T (ed) Thinking Through Dialogue Oxford: Practical Philosophy.

aesthetic qualities[9].

However, a picture, a piece of music or a craft object does have a different kind of physical reality from text, as well as inescapable aesthetic qualities. These qualities necessitate an approach to the inquiry that is different from the text-based one.

The special qualities of works of art and other objects as starting points for inquiry:

Translation, comparisons

Works of art or craft and other objects exist in a non-verbal medium. Everything that is said about them is a translation of a certain kind. Ideas about them have to be verbalised. The difficult process of verbalisation can be facilitated by establishing criteria for describing, interrogating and evaluating these objects. The presentation of more than one item – either of the same artistic genre or of two different ones – creates a link between them. Linking leads to the concept of comparison[10], which in turn aids the construction of criteria, even in the minds of very young children.

Before starting work with art and craft objects, the' Connections' game is a good introduction to comparisons and the formulation of criteria:

Out of a large number of small (everyday) objects presented to the group, the children are asked to find any two that are connected and identify the connecting feature, or find three with an odd one out. The connecting/distinguishing features can be listed and grouped into higher-level concepts.

With more advanced groups the same technique can be applied to works of art or craft, without prescribing the concepts in whose terms the children are

[9] It appears that in 1980 Lipman would have seen such qualities as distracting – see Murris (1997) pp. 236-237.

[10] At least in Great Britain, comparison is a sadly underrated and underused educational tool, probably because it hints at un-PC value judgements.

to consider the stimuli. I present two items. As the children start describing the two objects (one or both of which could be a 'sounding object', i.e. music or other sounds), I encourage them to make connections between the two items. This leads to comparisons, which enables me to ask for the basis of comparison, which leads to criteria. That the items they are dealing with have a physical - tangible or audible – reality seems to be quite helpful, especially for young children, slow or unconfident learners of all ages and kinaesthetic or visual learners.

Some examples: any two pieces of music enable the criteria of length, structure, dynamics, instrumentation, texture, etc., not to mention style, age, (social, religious and/or spiritual) function or significance to emerge because the two pieces will differ from each other in these dimensions. Relating a piece of music to the dance it has given rise to, whether be it samba or classical ballet, enables interrogation of the creative process that connects music and movement within the folk tradition of samba and in the ballet choreographer's mind. Examining an image and a piece of music in relation to each other throws new light on both works of art[11]. This approach makes it possible for children to construct ideas about both of them that have come about solely as a result of the juxtaposition[12], inhabiting the intellectual space between the two works of art.

The contexts of works of art

A work of art is designed and constructed according to inherent rules that can be discussed in PI. Such a discussion is philosophical or, more precisely, aesthetic, because it concerns the meaning and form of a work of art. However, the dialogue usually also touches on sociological, cultural-theoretical and historical concerns.

[11] Further examples in Liptai, S. (2004) Creativity in Music and Art in: Fisher, R. & Williams, M. (eds) Unlocking Creativity London: Fulton.
[12] See Liptai, S. (no date) "Two pictures and two pieces of music: How are they related?" Unpublished manuscript.

A work of art or craft usually has multiple, embodied, meanings. The deciphering of the meaning(s) of a work of art depends not only on the ability to think philosophically and to express these thoughts in linguistically coherent ways, but on two other factors as well: firstly, it is necessary to understand the prevailing cultural conventions, i.e. the rules of the genre. For example, the role of improvisation is radically different in a folk lullaby, in a Beethoven symphony and in jazz pianist Bill Evans' playing[13]. Secondly, the cultural and historical environment that gave rise to the work needs to be understood as fully as possible for the maximum meaning to be derived from a work of art. The children are likely to gain more from the pieces of music just mentioned if they have some understanding of what each of them sets out to achieve in relation to other pieces of the same period and medium.

Inquiries that move between understanding the piece's context and children's own interpretations of the meaning(s) of a work of art seem to have a liberating effect on the inquiring groups. Regardless of social background and previous knowledge and understanding about the arts, the groups soon come to acquire an astonishing degree of openness to new arts experiences.

(It is, of course, possible to enjoy, for example, music without knowing or thinking about it but an approach devoid of deliberate and effortful thinking does not, to my mind, have a place in philosophical inquiry - even though a discussion about why people may prefer not to think about music they listen to, naturally, does.)

I would, therefore, argue that philosophical inquiry about works of art or craft – or aesthetic inquiry – has a different set of complexities from text-based

[13] The lullaby and Bill Evans are not expected to be heard exactly the same way twice: improvisation in the sense of changing some of the notes and rhythms is an integral element of both genres but governed by slightly different internal rules. In the Beethoven symphony the notes and rhythms are fixed by convention. The areas of freedom for personal interpretation, i.e. improvisation, are narrower and more subtle: they rest in, for example, the specific emphasis on certain notes considered important, the relative weight given to different phrases, the dynamic range, the relative length of the pauses between sections of the piece.

inquiry. These complexities lend aesthetic inquiry a special kind of richness. That inquiries about the arts might have a profound effect on children is indicated by a British project that aimed at raising disadvantaged London children's emotional literacy - as well as P4C – skills through regular inquiries about the arts[14].

A piece of plainchant can be compared with an unaccompanied song by Joan Baez, an African folk-singer and 20th century Italian composer: Luciano Berio's composition: For Cathy (written for the voice of his singer wife Cathy Berberian and), consisting of a huge range of vocal noises, including laughter and cat noises, but excluding 'proper' singing. The comparative analysis of the pieces can lead to a discussion, for example, about their relative artistic/aesthetic merits; the hugely different aesthetic and social functions they fulfil in their own historic context; the difference between singing and speaking as a function of the human voice and/or about the nature and role of the human voice as a musical instrument. A group of 9-11 year olds, in response to The Geographical Fugue – a rhythmically recited, and not sung, 4-part fugue -, African drumming and For Cathy, mused about the nature of singing and speaking and the concepts of music and non-music; they created new musical concepts like 'talk-singing' (which does, in fact, exist as Sprechgesang 'speech-song', used most notably by Arnold Schoenberg and Alban Berg, but the children were unlikely to have been aware of this) and 'voicing' i.e. using the human voice for a musical purpose but not necessarily through singing[15].

Involving the senses, catering for different learning styles

In aesthetic inquiry more of the senses are engaged than in text-based ones. The stimulus has a physical reality that is often more potent than the reality of text, and appeals to the eyes or the ears and possibly to the other senses. This

[14] Antidote: The Campaign for Emotional Literacy (2004) 'Thinking Together: Philosophy for Children and Whole-School Emotional Literacy' Video, Dover, UK: Smallwood Publishing.
[15] Liptai, S. (2003) Thinking About Music: Developing Children's Musical Thinking Through Philosophical Enquiry in Primary Classrooms PhD Brunel University, Chapters 5-7.

helps children who are predominantly visual, aural or kinaesthetic learners to focus on the stimulus. It also helps those with short attention span and fidgety limbs since the point at which the posing of questions can start is reached quite quickly because there is no text to share.

A low ability 9 year-old, who was generally withdrawn in inquiries, became animated for the first time when, in a' thinking game', intended as a warm-up, he was handed an empty 2-liter plastic water bottle and asked to think of uses an alien culture might put this object. Some time later, in a rare extended contribution, he made well-reasoned connections between two images and two pieces of music, whilst continuing to be largely taciturn in text-based inquiries[16].

The magnetic nature of works of art

A work of art or craft has a coherence that is absent from P4C texts. Through the force of this aesthetic coherence, a work of art or craft grabs and contaminates the viewer or listener and forces him or her to revisit it repeatedly, to gain new and deeper layers of meaning. A work of art refuses to be used as just a springboard for the emerging philosophical ideas and then to be abandoned.

The repeated interrogative revisiting dictated by the work of art results in the kind immersion that is likely to be rare in most children's experiences, except for those of the odd musical Wunderkind. For children of different abilities and interests to have various works of art firmly lodged in their minds has to be an enriching experience, akin to, but deeper than, knowing lots of poems or songs by heart. These 'stored' works of art can start functioning as reference points, as resources, as thinking repertoire for children. They may come to influence children's aesthetic choices.

[16] Liptai, S. (2004) "Raising Oracy Levels in Primary Schools with Disadvantaged Children Through Philosophical Enquiry" The Braunstone Community Association Philosophy for Children Pilot Project Leicester: BCA.

Special objects for inquiry

Religious objects

Religious artefacts are a good way of starting inquiries about religious – or non-religious - beliefs and practices.

Religious artefacts tie the individual to a community in an unequivocal fashion. The dogma behind the significance of these artefacts is usually not negotiable: it is a given for the whole religious community. However, there is space for the individual to express the particular, personal significance of religious objects for his/her belief systems, habits and life style.

PI could well be the first place for many children to try to articulate the meaning to them as individuals of the special objects of their religion. In the multicultural environments of many British schools several faiths are usually represented, along with different kinds of non-faith. When children explain the significance to them of the Torah or the cross or the Koranic inscriptions on the mosque walls to other children of different faiths, they give of themselves not only as individuals but also as responsible and committed members of their (faith) community. They offer a glimpse into their coherent religious world to children who come from different worlds. The – social, emotional and cognitive – cohesive power of such interactions cannot be overestimated. It is precisely such supportive, attentive, respectful, informative and open-minded communication between communities that is sorely missing in the adult world. In my experience, far form being 'contaminated' by beliefs different from their own, children who have been given opportunities to discuss their religion with others in inquiry have tended to be confirmed in their faith, and their social standing has increased in their peer group.

A 7-year-old girl, with poor English and of a family that had recently emigrated to England from the Indian subcontinent, was regularly bullied by older boys in the playground. Her classmates generally ignored her. One day, in

an inquiry with pictures, she chose the photograph of a huge statue of the Buddha and proceeded, in her broken English, to tell the others about her family's Buddhist beliefs and customs. The class listened with rapt attention. From this day the girl's position in the class changed so much that in the end-of-term survey, some 4 months later, she was named by many as one of the best three thinkers in the class. At the same time the bullying abated because the child no longer behaved like a potential victim.

A 9-year old from a Jehovah's Witness family joined the lunchtime Philosophy Club just when the group started discussing questions about God, using a section of Sophie's World as starting point. I was afraid that the child's first visit to the club would also be her last because her family would not allow her to mix again with a Buddhist, two Muslims, other (Anglican) Christians, a few confirmed atheists and some 'don't knows'. In the event the child had no trouble at home because, in the course of the discussion, she had an opportunity to proclaim her faith to the rest of the group and thus fulfilled her religious obligation.

Craft objects

A special case has to be made for works of craft that function as everyday objects.

A cup, for example, is usually mass designed but, in relation to an individual, it can fulfil the role of a unique object. Its uniqueness comes from the fact that it has been chosen from a large range of possible cups: the act of choosing renders it special[17]. It can become unique by acquiring special personal significance through a private connection, for example it may have been given as a present by someone significant or could commemorate a special private moment or event. Of course, 'proper' works of art can acquire personal

[17] Cf. Dewey, J (1934) Art as Experience New York: Capricorn (1958) Chapter 1.

significance, too - I know someone whose 'love tune' is Beethoven's Op. 111 Piano sonata - but great works of art are so redolent of embodied meaning that it is difficult for an individual to impose his/her own personal meaning on them. By contrast, the special quality of the humble cup resides in its ability to take on imposed personal meanings, yet remain an object with its own aesthetic – and functional - qualities. Furthermore, the cup is also a social signifier: through its particular features it binds its owner into a specific social context. (For example, to my continental European mind tall, cylindrical bone china cups with exuberant floral motifs express a certain, essential, aspect of Britishness). Hence the cup has social value as a link between the individual and his/her community, i.e. the people who might be offered tea out of it and who may or may not share the taste in cups - and other values - of the cup's owner. Craft & other every day objects validate a person both as an individual and as a social being. In inquiry these values and validations can be explicated. These objects, unlike 'proper' works of art, are also democratic in that everyone, including every child in school, is likely to have some objects that locate or define her or him.

It is the play between all these dimensions: the aesthetic, the social and the personal, that makes the cup such a rich source of inquiry[18].

Craft objects, then, span the divide between 'proper' works of art and trivial everyday objects. Through interrogating works of craft in inquiry, children come to understand something of their own emotional make-up, as well as the emotional and material structures, i.e. the objects representing the particular tastes, convictions, life-styles, they are surrounded by at home and at school. They begin to distinguish between what is given to them in terms of taste and

[18] Mind you, if a cup is of high artistic merit, as, for example, a Bauhaus or a Charles Rennie Mackintosh design might be, with possible added rarity value, then that cup is likely to transmogrify into a 'proper' work of art: its owner is more likely to display it, much like a painting or a sculpture, than drink out of it.

preferences by their family and community and what is unique to them as individuals. They compare their tastes with those of other children. They begin to deconstruct their selves as artistic and art-and-design-consuming individuals[19].

What is a good stimulus for an enquiry with objects?

Something ordinary, like a piece of clothing or jewellery, which can be problematised by addressing our assumptions about it – as if seeing the object in a new light.

Something problematical: controversial, e.g. (apparently) sacrilegious, like Andres Serrano's Piss Christ, a crucifix bathed in a yellow liquid that turns out to be urine; apparently incomplete, like Ernst Toch's Geographical Fugue, see p.4; ugly or unappetising, like Britpack artist Damien Hirst' 'The Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living', consisting of a dead shark suspended in formaldehyde in a transparent box.

A good stimulus encourages the reconceptualisation of aesthetic categories and those of taste (e.g. likes and dislikes, beauty and ugliness, pleasantness - especially on the ear), leading to the construction of (new) criteria.

What is not aesthetic inquiry?

An inquiry that uses an aesthetic object as no more than a trigger for a discussion is usually not aesthetic.

As an example, works of art like Haydn's oratorio: The Seasons or Constable's Haywain, both of which make explicit references to nature, can be used as starting points for inquiries about, shall we say, ecological questions. However, such inquiries will not be aesthetic because the works of art are used

[19] For example, discussions about social values associated with fashion can lead to the reduction of children's anxiety about not having the right kind of 'gear' and to a more reflective stance on the methods and purposes of the advertising industry.

not as themselves but as vehicles for a particular agenda. In such a situation natural objects or photographs of nature, which successfully straddle the divide between art and reportage, would be much better employed because there is always the danger that works of art will serve more of a distraction from, than an aid to, contemplating the fate of the planet.

Such non-aesthetic use of aesthetic objects is, to my mind, legitimate but such inquiries ought not to be mistaken for aesthetic inquiries.

Some types of aesthetic enquiry questions

Aesthetic inquiry investigates fundamental questions about the arts, for example: *What is art? What is music? What is not art/music/dance etc.? Who decides? What criteria can be created for deciding?* – largely aesthetic questions.

There are questions about the sociology of art*: What kind of art belongs to whom in our, or another, society? How is ownership decided? How do different social groups express themselves through their arts?*

Other questions seem to interrogate the psychological or socio-psychological aspects of the arts from the point of view of the individual child: *Why do I like some objects of art and dislike others? How are my tastes constructed? What communal, ethnic or family influences can I detect in my tastes? How are my tastes different from those of my (family and other) community? How are they different from and similar to, those of my peer group?*

The outcomes of aesthetic inquiry

Aesthetic inquiry can lead to deeper understanding of the self as a part of various communities.

It can also result in an increased understanding of the self as distinct from its natural (family, ethnic) and arbitrary (educational peer group) communities.

It fosters flexibility and creativity in interpreting works of art. For example, different interpretations of an abstract painting, including which way up it goes, lead to greater insight into its possible meanings.

Aesthetic inquiry closes the gap between the purely impressionistic - and often superficial - and the purely technical ('there were three instruments and they got louder, then softer') accounts of works of art, enabling children to derive meaning for themselves from their arts experiences, through the joint contemplation of works of art and the joint construction of a language for articulating their thoughts and experiences.

Aesthetic enquiry often addresses the personal and communal experience more directly than text. With some exceptions, like for example the holy books of different religions, texts are usually more arbitrary than objects: they may not be widely shared across cultures and generations.

Aesthetic inquiry sets up a virtuous cycle of (communal) problem-posing, interrogating, understanding and enjoyment of the arts, leading to increased openness to new or unfamiliar artistic idioms and manifestations, as well as the development of a reasoned critical stance.

It is an elitist, yet democratic approach to learning: it addresses questions about the arts with a rigour that is seldom present in conventional schooling - especially in music education -, yet it presents opportunities for high-level aesthetic and philosophical engagement for all children, including those from aesthetically impoverished backgrounds.

The special force of aesthetic inquiry? – a bit of hypothesising

Objects, whether works of art or craft, natural or ordinary ones, often function as symbols. Even everyday objects can be accessories to ritual, they can be iconic and they can have different kinds of symbolic meanings.

Aesthetic inquiry, and especially inquiry about objects with symbolic

significance, digs deeply into the psyche of both the individual and the community. It is possible that such an inquiry addresses itself to aspects of human existence that may well predate fluent and rational verbal communication; to the times when objects represented a great deal of content that was not possible, or was not seen as necessary, to put into words. Objects with symbolic significance seem always to have been the premier devices for identifying and validating the individual in his or her community. Enquiries about such powerful objects can be seen as logically preceding, underlying or fundamental to text-based inquiries.

The diverse micro- and macro-communities we inhabit all have their powerful symbols. Interrogating and sharing our understandings about them in communities of inquiry seems like a greatly affirming endeavour.