

SCHOOL CREATIVE LESSONS FROM 13-14 YEAR OLD PUPILS' PERSPECTIVE AND ITS RELEVANCE TO TEACHERS

Marit Mõistlik, Lilian Liiväär, Eha Rüütel

Tallinn University, Tallinn, Estonia

E-mail: marit.moistlik@tlu.ee, lilian.liivaar@tlu.ee, eha@tlu.ee

Abstract

The focus of this article is to analyse what associations are related with school's creative lessons (music, art, craft, physical education) and how should teachers interpret those associations. In addition there is a comparison across all creative lessons about the feeling which is felt by pupils before entering the lesson (response alternatives: "I'm looking forward to this lesson, I'm happy to go there"; "It's like any other lesson, nothing special"; "I'm anxious, I feel frustrated about going there"). The sample (N = 227) consisted of seventh form pupils of seven upper secondary schools of Tallinn (the largest city of Estonia with 420,000 inhabitants) aged 13–14 (47% of them were boys, N = 107, and 53% girls, N = 120). Pupils' associations formed six thematic categories describing the most prevalent themes: (1) Teacher, (2) Activities, (3) Emotions, (4) Objects, (5) Classroom environment, and (6) Schoolwork load. Results show that music lesson stands out from other creative lessons both with negative associations and more negative entering feeling. That outcome is discussed from the music teacher's point of view – how it could be interpreted and what it reflects from current educational situation.

Key words: adolescents, associations, creative lessons.

Introduction

The area of Arts (according to Estonian National Curriculum lessons of art and music included) plays an important role in our everyday life, making it more fulfilling and emotionally balanced via a practiced hobby that counterbalances verbal activity and analytical thinking, typical of other subject by adding figurative, synthesising and intuitive input. Dealing with Arts has a positive impact on learning any subject. (Art subjects, 2010a, 2010b). The importance of teaching Music and Arts besides other subjects is very big – it enables to notice pupils' emotional needs and create the atmosphere for self-expressions when a young person learns rhythms, coordination, sense of beauty, creativity and ways for analysing these phenomena. Vikat, Treier ja Raudsepp (2005) emphasise that positive emotions obtained during the above-mentioned lessons are priceless from the aspect of educational value, however, often underestimated. The encouraging positive background would be recorded in the memory for the entire life; guiding the person to concerts, exhibitions, theatrical performances, and enables to enjoy self-activity and co-performance. The above-said is confirmed by the author's earlier survey (Mõistlik, 2009).

Art lessons should be an essential part of education due to soothing and energising experience. Not only it is a prime developmental activity, encouraging creative language and social skills, but it also produces something to admire and wonder at, and to inspire conversation afterwards (Whiteford, 2001). Art teachers should keep in mind that sensitivity to Arts is like a fragile plant, which has to be catered for from the early childhood. Creating an environment in

the lesson provides pupils with the confirmation that drawing is not just some kind of infertile “scrawling”, but develops the manual skills and thinking, also contributing to the general development of the child (Vikat, Treier, Raudsepp, 2005).

Craft lessons constitute the generation of ideas, designing, modelling and making items/products and presenting them. During the performance of tasks and discussions one learns to notice the design functionality of item, relationships and links within creative art and the cultural background. The initiative, enterprising spirit and creativity of the youth are supported (Tehnoloogia. 2010). Children whatever their age love making things. They need time to explore and experiment with a wide range of materials and derive great satisfaction from an end result (Ansell, 2003). Craft lessons should all allow before mentioned experiences.

The knowledge, skills and experience obtained in physical educations (P.E.) lessons form a basis for pupils' independent exercising habit. The joy of being able to exercise movement in school favours interest in sports and dance events, encouraging pupils to follow this interest and take part in activities. The organization of P.E. studies ensures pupils' physical, moral, social and aesthetical development and supports the creation of the personality as a whole (Kehaline kasvatus, 2010). Survey conducted in Lithuania states that positive pupils' attitude towards physical education as a subject is developed when in attempt to encourage pedagogical and social understanding of physical training the inter-subject and group work is used (Bagdonienė, 2005, 34). In addition, Bagdonienė presents the main sources of the formation of positive attitude towards physical education as follows: (1) positive good relationship with the teacher, (2) knowledge gained during physical education lessons, (3) teacher's ability to make his/her students interested.

Problem of Research

This article is a part of a major survey “Creative activities in a pupil's life”, which goal is to find out how creative hobbies and attunement towards creative subjects at school are connected to the indicators of creativity and well-being. Hereby the authors provide an overview of the attunement and free associations towards creative lessons.

The subject plans of creative lessons should provide a vision of the extent of the many-sided and self-exploring lessons. Can it be performed in real learning situations? The age group of 13-14-year-olds is rather complicated according to the opinion of teacher-trainees and active teachers. Based on Erikson's stages of psychosocial development (1968) pupils of Form 7, dependant on their year of birth are in either in the phase of Middle School or Early adolescence, which teaching has proved to be complicated due to the age of the participants.

The focus of research is to analyse what associations are related with school's creative lessons (music, art, craft, physical education*), and how should teachers interpret those associations. It is important for the teachers of creative subjects to know which are the “most important things” (associations) that pupils relate with these lessons and their attunement towards these lessons.

Methodology of Research

General Background of Research

School inquiry investigating pupils creative activities in relation with school climate, personality and creativity indicators carried out by Rüütel, Mõistlik, Liiväär, Heinla in 2010. The study comprises two questions of the survey: (1) associations related to creative lessons at school and (2) attunement towards creative lessons.

Sample of Research

The study was conducted with 13-14 year old pupils from seven general education schools of the largest city of Estonia (420,000 inhabitants). A total of 227 pupils participated in the study (47% of them were boys, $n = 107$ and 53% girls, $n = 120$). The chosen schools were all general education schools with Estonian tuition language (with primary, lower and upper secondary stages; pupils aged from seven to eighteen) and represented different districts of the city. 229 questionnaires were handed out, 229 were returned and 227 were used in the analysis due to two respondents having not indicated their gender. According to the plan more schools were supposed to be involved in the initial phase of the survey, however, several schools did not agree to participate in the survey. However, the number of respondents was sufficiently large to make statistical findings and so was the gender division among the sample.

Instrument and Procedures

The methodology of data collection constituted a semi-structured questionnaire, compiled by the members of the research team (Rüütel, Liiväär, Mõistlik, Heinla). The questionnaire, which was anonymous and voluntary, included structured and open questions about pupils' creative leisure activities, conditions related to creative lessons, pupils' attitudes towards creative lessons and their school. Survey was conducted during class time; participation was voluntary and was carried out from January to March 2010 with the consent of the schools' administrations. A school representative was present when the questionnaire was administered.

To get information about *the attunement towards creative lessons at school*, the following question was asked: "With what kind of feeling do you go to the lesson?" (response alternatives: 1 – I'm looking forward to this lesson, I'm happy to go there, 2 – It's like any other lesson, nothing special, 3 – Feeling anxiety, going to this lesson with unpleasant feelings).

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis was carried out in two steps using content analysis method. First, the theme-based horizontal coding was used for finding thematic categories. Second, the vertical analysis was used for grouping the associations under each category by lessons and by frequency. Descriptive analysis of survey ratings of attunement towards creative lessons was conducted to describe division of responses, chi-square statistic was used for calculating gender differences.

Results of Research

Pupils were asked about the feeling that they go with to creative lessons, the results of which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Attunement towards creative lessons (by gender).

With what feeling you go to a music lesson?				
	Looking forward to this lesson, going gladly n / %	Lesson like every other, nothing special n / %	Feeling anxiety, going to this lesson with unpleasant feelings n / %	Total n
Boys	16 / 15.4	71 / 68.3	17 / 16.3	104
Girls	20 / 17.0	77 / 65.2	21 / 17.8	118
Total	36 / 16.2	148 / 66.7	38 / 17.1	224
With what feeling you go to a art lesson? (Pearson's $\chi^2 = 6.01$; $p < 0.05$)				
Boys	23 / 22.8	64 / 63.3	14 / 13.9	101
Girls	44 / 37.9	61 / 52.6	11 / 9.5	116
Total	67 / 30.9	125 / 57.6	25 / 11.5	217
With what feeling you go to a craft lesson?				
Boys	51 / 49.5	44 / 42.7	8 / 7.8	103
Girls	46 / 38.7	52 / 43.7	21 / 17.6	119
Total	97 / 43.7	96 / 43.2	29 / 13.1	224
With what feeling you go to a physical education lesson? (Pearson's $\chi^2 = 18.19$, $p < 0.001$)				
Boys	59 / 57.8	36 / 35.3	7 / 6.9	102
Girls	37 / 31.6	55 / 47.0	25 / 21.4	117
Total	96 / 43.8	91 / 41.6	32 / 14.6	219

The goal of the questionnaire is to map the number of pupils in Form 7, having a positive attunement towards creative lessons (“Looking forward to this lesson, going gladly”). In other words, to establish the number of pupils for whom creative lessons provide the fulfilment of the goal (at least partly) as described in National Curriculum. Concurrently, it is important to acknowledge the other end of the attunement scale (“Feeling anxiety, going to this lesson with unpleasant feelings”), providing data about creative lessons having an impact on pupils from a negative aspect. A group of pupils with a neutral attitude is positioned in between the two (“Lesson like every other, nothing special”), but may be regarded as a group with a concealed potential. In other words, these pupils have not decided yet whether the creative lesson is pleasant for them, but at the same time it has not been connected with anything unpleasant either. Different opinions towards lessons by gender groups definitely deserve attention as well.

Categories of Most Important Things Related to Creative Lessons

Pupils' associations formed six thematic categories describing the most prevalent themes.

- (1) Teacher – answers concerning a teacher and related issues, $n = 90$;
- (2) Actions - answers concerning activities, $n = 492$;
- (3) Emotions - answers concerning the main focus on emotions, $n = 174$;
- (4) Objects - answers concerning objects, $n = 92$;
- (5) Classroom environment - answers concerning both emotional side of classroom environment, $n = 60$;
- (6) Schoolwork load - answers concerning issues with the load of studying in particular lessons, $n = 57$.

Figure 1. Illustrates how categories are divided according to four different lessons:

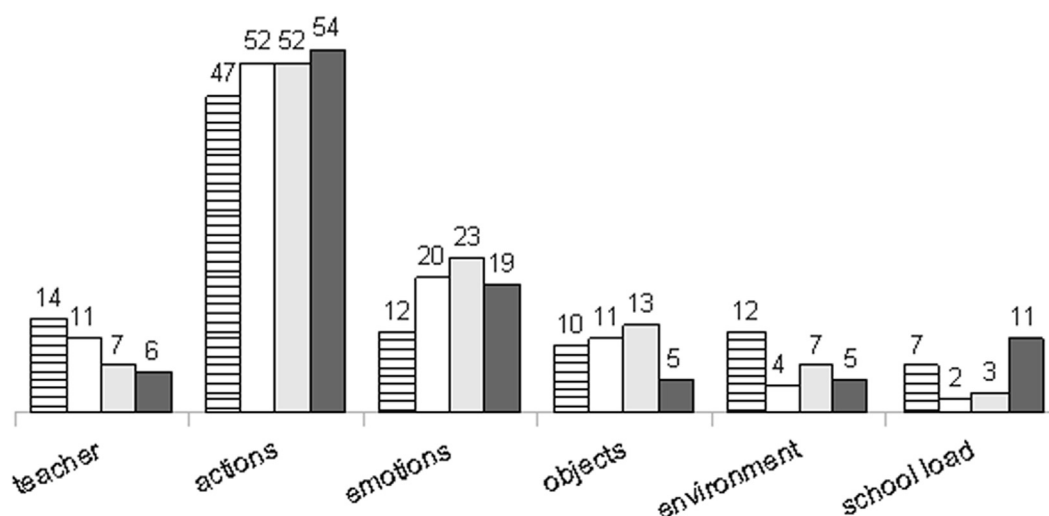


Figure 1. Appearance of thematic categories among creative lessons (in percentage).

Associations related to the *teacher* (category 1) may be put forward, mostly (14.2%) mentioned in relation to the music lesson and least pointed out in case of the P.E. Lesson (5.8%). *Activities* (category 2) formed broadly half of the associations in regard to all lessons, but were mostly related to the physical education lesson (54.1%) and least to the music lesson (48.5%). *Emotions* (category 3) indicated to the handicraft lesson (22.5%) and were least associated with the music lesson (12.1%). Different *objects* (category 4) were mostly mention in regard to the handicraft lesson (12.8%) and least associated with the P.E. Lesson (5.4%). *Environment* (category 5) was most substantial in the context of the music lesson (12.1%) and least important in case of the art lesson (3.9%). The last category 6 – *schoolwork load* – was associated primarily with the P.E.lesson (11.2%) and least connected with the art lesson (2.2%).

Although the amount of responses differed in regard to different creative lessons, it may be stated that the similarity in general distribution was noticeable. The biggest difference is evident when the focus of the statements placed in categories is targeted to the emotionality factor. It shows that the respondents' emotions, demonstrated in regard to associations, can be divided into three groups: (1) positive, (2) neutral and (3) negative emotions. Each unit of analysis could occur in only one category, but the respondent's answer could be divided into several categories when it contained more than one unit of analysis. Figure 2 illustrates the emotional focus of associations in regard to creative lessons:

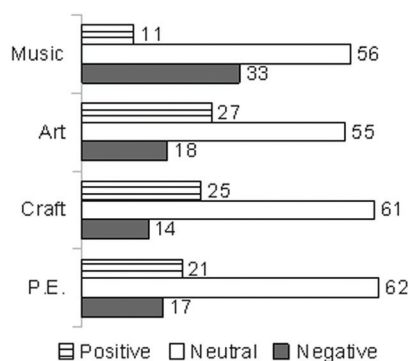


Figure 2. Emotional associations from creative lessons (in percentage).

Figure 2 demonstrates that the music lesson differs from other creative lessons mostly due to negative associations (33%), in addition, positive associations related to the music lesson are also the smallest (11%). In this article authors want to emphasize the most frequently mentioned associations, i.e. the responses most frequently mentioned in relation to creative lessons. As the number of associations related to creative lessons was not limited in the questionnaire, they were mentioned in the proportion as follows: 249 (26%) associations related to the music lesson, 230 (24%) to the art lesson, 227 (23%) to the handicraft/manual training lesson and 259 (27%) to the P.E. lesson. Table 2 reflects associations in regard to creative lessons, which pupils have related to different lessons in more than three cases.

Table 2. Associations mentioned at least three times (grouped by lessons).

	association	n
Music	singing	65
	(new) piano	12
	instruments	6
	could sing well	6
	noise	6
	music	5
	(pupils) yelling	4
	instrument playing	3
	you can do what you want	3
	Art	drawing
being involved, co-operation		7
crap, boring lesson		7
painting		5
too strict, tough teacher		4
Craft	knitting	15
	handicraft	8
	woodwork	5
	constructing	5
	crocheting	3
	chatting	3
P.E.	running	19
	sports	18
	basketball	9
	playing	8
	doing exercises	7
	soccer	7
	could move oneself	6
	ballgames	5
	volleyball	5
	amusing	3
	tiredness	3
	gym	3

Figure 2 demonstrated the distribution of positive, neutral and negative associations as percentage by four creative lessons. In order to get a survey of the emotional colouring of the associations, on the basis of which the three above-mentioned groups were established, Table 3 presents some selected responses:

Table 3. Examples of emotional categorisation of associations by lessons.

	Positive examples	Negative examples
Music	<p><i>"Nice teacher – we always learn something new"</i> <i>"One can feel relaxed"</i> <i>"Singing together is fun"</i> <i>"Good songs"</i></p> <p>also: <i>good feeling, cool, being relaxed</i></p>	<p><i>"Screaming pupils and a screaming teacher"</i> <i>"No one can be in peace"</i> <i>"Do not need music in life"</i> <i>"Waste of time"</i></p> <p>also: <i>rubbish, senseless, boring, a bad lesson</i></p>
Art	<p><i>"Possible to work in the lesson"</i> <i>"I feel comfortable, interested, nice"</i> <i>"Nice atmosphere"</i> <i>"Just a perfect lesson"</i></p> <p>also: <i>more or less OK, rather cool, fun, good</i></p>	<p><i>"Teacher screams at us"</i> <i>"Teacher is angry"</i> <i>"Teacher does not explain properly what to do"</i> <i>"Starting the lesson is problematic"</i></p> <p>also: <i>whining, fooling</i></p>
Craft	<p><i>"I can do things that are necessary for me"</i> <i>"Possible to do something interesting"</i> <i>"Pleasant, because it is never boring"</i> <i>"Teacher allows us to relax"</i></p> <p>also: <i>very good, useful, exciting, cool, funniest</i></p>	<p><i>"The worst lesson ever"</i> <i>"As we will not need it in life, no one wants to deal with it"</i> <i>"Unpleasant atmosphere"</i> <i>"Boring, nonsense and boring once again"</i> <i>"The most terrible lesson"</i></p>
P.E.	<p><i>"Teacher is kind and helps all the time, understanding"</i> <i>"Can take a rest from mental work"</i> <i>"Good physical exercise in the morning and instead of training"</i> <i>"Everything is super"</i></p> <p>also: <i>very good, good feeling, best, favourite, exciting, cool, fun</i></p>	<p><i>"Teacher becomes insulted, the lesson is often wasted on scolding only"</i> <i>"Do not like the teacher because of the attitude"</i> <i>"Boring games"</i></p> <p>also: <i>railing, screaming, madhouse, boredom, tension</i></p>

The table does not include associations with neutral emotions which consists mainly associations related to activities (category 2) and objects (category 4) the most popular of which are referred to also in Table 2.

Discussion

The focus of this article is to analyse what associations are related with school's creative lessons (music, art, craft, physical education), and how teachers should interpret those associations. The previous survey of the first author (Mõistlik, 2010) points out that attunement towards the lesson is broadly connected with the pupil's future activity as an adult - whether or not he/she is going to be engaged in creative activity. In other words, positive attunement towards creative lessons favours the emergence of creative hobbies and free time activities in further life. We have already referred to the fact in the introduction that creative lessons have a kind of extraordinary position at school, because their essence is targeted more on emotional (in case of P.E. also motoric) needs and the created atmosphere favours many-sided development and self-expression. The mentioned activities would balance verbal activity and analytical thinking predominant in other lessons.

A question may arise - whether attunement towards different creative lessons is important? What does it refer to? Does it have to or whom does it have to alarm? Isn't it the

aim of the comprehensive school (incl. creative lessons) to be “pleasant” and generate positive emotions? In regard to these questions it is important (especially in the context of creative lessons) for teachers to think about it in a longer perspective whether the lesson or the course has the potential of the creative lesson for the youth? The therapeutic approach model created by the first author (Möistlik, 2011) is one of the possible variants to help the teacher to realise his/her central role in it. Authors see an important outcome in the formation of a life-long hobby supported by the teacher in creative lessons of the comprehensive school. It is also confirmed by a German scholar - professor of empirical and psychological music education Heiner Gembris (2002, 503), who has said that encouraging musical learning (may be expanded also to creative activities in general) in childhood and adolescence is an investment sure to produce long-term benefits at more mature ages. Even if no explicit support of the musical development has taken place during the early part of life, musical learning, musical activities, and some musical development are still possible during adulthood.

Some negative associations from Table 3 convey the message that the practical value creative lessons is not always understood by students as well (music: “*Do not need music in life*” “*Waste of time*”; craft: “*As we will not need it in life, no one wants to deal with it*”, “*Boring, nonsense and boring once again*”). There seems to be the need for linking creative subjects with the practical side of life. Also, the wider notion of creativity (for more details see Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009), especially the concept of “mini-c” (inherent in the learning process) should be considered by teachers as one option to (1) spotlight and support pupils' innate creativity (incl. musicality), and (2) relate creative activities with everyday situations in more transparent and appealing manner.

Results show that music lesson stands out from other creative lessons both with negative associations and more negative (including higher levels of anxiety) entering feeling. LaBillois and Lagacé-Séguin (2009) agree that teachers play a key role in the management and recognition of anxiety in children. However, teachers are not a uniform group of individuals, each developing a unique pedagogical style. A question may arise – whether there is any optimal teaching style that takes into account the above-mentioned aspects? According to Felder and Brent (2005) the optimal teaching style is a balanced one that sometimes matches students' preferences, so their discomfort level is not too great for them to learn effectively, and sometimes goes against their preferences, forcing them to stretch and grow in directions they might be inclined to avoid if given the option.

In addition to the above-said, it must be pointed out that music, art and exercising comprises therapeutic output, confirmed by the practice in the therapy, and including the youth, in the corresponding area (music therapy: Priestley, 1975; Bunt, 1994; Wigram, Nygaard Pedersen, & Bonde, 2002; McFerran, 2010; art therapy: Stepney, 2001; Silverstone, 2007; Case & Dalley, 2008; dance and movement therapy: Tortora, 2005; Koch & Bräuninger, 2006; McCarthy, 2008).

Conclusions

It is important to conclude with emphasising once again that the positive associations obtained in creative lessons should not be underestimated or considered less valuable. Encouraging positive background is recorded in the person for the entire life, guiding the person to concerts, exhibitions, theatrical performances, to practicing sports and exercising, and enables to enjoy self-activity and co-performance. Positive emotions proceeding from creative lessons pave the way for the positive attunement towards these lessons, encouraging the emergence of future hobbies that would significantly enrich the person's life during the school time and in the adulthood after graduating from school.

Authors suggest for further studies (1) to examine the background factors which depend

on the attunement of the creative lessons, and (2) how school and teachers could make the creativity and well-being that is inherent in creative lessons more visible and perceptible for pupils.

Note

*As there are no compulsory dance lessons in general education schools in Estonia, P.E. lessons were chosen instead on them to list of creative lessons.

References

- Ansell, H. (2003). *Design and Technology. Early Years activities to promote children's creative development*. UK: Belair Publications.
- Bagdonienė, L. (2005). *Development of the 5th and 6th form pupils' attitudes towards physical education as a school subject. Summary of doctoral dissertation*. Vilnius: Vilnius Pedagoginis Universitetas.
- Bunt, L. (1994). *Music Therapy – An Art beyond Words*. London: Routledge.
- Case, C., & Dalley, T. (eds.) (2008). *Art therapy with children: from infancy to adolescence*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. New York: Norton.
- Felder, R. M., & Brent, R. (2005). Understanding Student Differences. *Journal of Engineering Education*, 94 (1), 57-72.
- Gembris, H. (2002). The Development of Musical Abilities. In: R. Colwell, C. Richardson (eds.), *The New Handbook of Research on Music Teaching and Learning* (pp. 487-508). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kehaline kasvatus*. (2010). Põhikooli riiklik õppekava. [Physical education. National curriculum for elementary school] Vabariigi Valitsuse 28. jaanuari 2010. a määruse nr 14 lisa 8, RT I, 6, 22.
- Koch, S. C., & Bräuninger, I. (eds.) (2006). *Advances in dance, movement therapy: theoretical perspectives and empirical findings*. Berlin: Logos-Verlag.
- Kaufmann, J. C., & Beghetto, R. A. (2009). Beyond Big and Little: The Four C Model for Creativity. *Review of General Psychology*, 13(1), 1-12.
- Kunstinaised* (2010a). Põhikooli riiklik õppekava. [Art subjects. National curriculum for elementary school] Vabariigi Valitsuse 28. jaanuari 2010. a määruse nr 14 lisa 6, RT I, 6, 22.
- Kunstinaised* (2010b). Gümnaasiumi riiklik õppekava. [Art subjects. National curriculum for secondary school] Vabariigi Valitsuse 28. jaanuari 2010. a määruse nr 13 lisa 6, RT I, 6, 21.
- LaBillois, J. M., & Lagacé-Séguin, D. G. (2009). Does a good fit matter? Exploring teaching styles, emotion regulation, and child anxiety in the classroom. *Early Child Development and Care*, 179(3), 303-315.
- McCarthy, D. (ed.) (2008). *Speaking about the unspeakable: non-verbal methods and experiences in therapy with children*. London, Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley.
- McFerran, K. (2010). *Adolescents, Music and Music Therapy: Methods and Techniques for Clinicians, Educators and Students*. London, Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Mõistlik, M. (2009). Connection between music lessons and involvement with music after leaving school. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, 18, 115-127.
- Mõistlik, M. (2010). Music lessons' influence in musical behaviour after leaving school: four profiles. In: T. Selke, G. Lock, M. Mõistlik, (eds.) *Evaluation, reflectivity and teaching methodologies in the framework of multi-cultural understanding*. Tallinn: Tallinn University, 59-65.
- Mõistlik, M. (2011). The model for therapeutic approach in music education. *Problems in Music Pedagogy*, 9, 19 -26.
- Priestley, M. (1975). *Music Therapy in Action*. Constable London.

- Silverstone, L. (2007). *Art therapy the person-centred way: art and the development of the person*. London, Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley.
- Stepney, S. A. (2001). *Art therapy with students at risk: introducing art therapy into an alternative learning environment for adolescents*. Springfield: Charles C. Thomas.
- Tehnoloogia* (2010). Põhikooli riiklik õppekava. [Technology. National curriculum for elementary school] Vabariigi Valitsuse 28. jaanuari 2010. a määruse nr 14 lisa 7, RT I, 6, 22.
- Tortora, S. (ed.) (2005). *The dancing dialogue: using the communicative power of movement with young children*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
- Vikat, M., Treier, H., & Raudsepp, I. (2005). *Muusika ja kunsti õpetamisest. Abiks õpetajale*. [About teaching music and art. Teacher's aid] Tallinn: Paar.
- Whiteford, R. (2001). *Art. Early years activities to promote children's creative development*. UK: Belair Publications.
- Wigram, T., Nygaard Pedersen, I., & Bonde, L., O. (2002). *A Comprehensive Guide to Music Therapy*. Jessica Kingsley London.

Advised by Tiit Lauk, Tallinn University, Estonia

Received: *January 30, 2012*

Accepted: *March 09, 2012*

Marit Mõistlik	Doctoral student, Lecturer, Tallinn University, Lai 13, 10133 Tallinn, Estonia. E-mail: marit.moistlik@tlu.ee Website: http://www.tlu.ee/muusika
Lillian Liiväär	Master in Arts Therapies, Tallinn University, Lai 13, 10133 Tallinn, Estonia. E-mail: lillian.liivaar@tlu.ee Website: http://www.tlu.ee
Eha Rüütel	PhD, Associate Professor, Tallinn University, Lai 13, 10133 Tallinn, Estonia. E-mail: eha@tlu.ee Website: http://www.tlu.ee/rakendusloome