**Art Age project**

WP 05

2013-05-20

Löftadalen´s residential college for adult education

Interviews with older students on Löftadalen´s residential college for adult education.

**Background:**

As a part of the project to find new methods for education and evaluation of esthetic learning within art and culture we have chosen to interview some of our older students.

With esthetic learning we mean that studies emanate from a physical act where the student develops curiosity and the urge to approach, assimilate and use esthetic expressions to understand and express thoughts and ideas, feelings and actions, acquire knowledge and skills.

**Methods:**

We have worked out a number of interview questions based on our issue; Are there any special differences and qualities regarding esthetic learning compared to other types of learning for older students? We also wanted to investigate whether the residential college for adult education has special qualities compared to other ways of acquiring knowledge, skills and other experiences within the esthetic field.

The questions are divided into three categories:

1. Questions concerning practical issues, facts and information.
2. Questions concerning conditions at school.
3. Questions concerning the students´ own reflections and thoughts on esthetic learning and creating.

**Implementation:**

We are two teachers who have interviewed five students whom we almost daily see in different teaching and conversation situations. The interviews were performed with one teacher interviewing one student. The students were allowed to read the questions ahead and consider their answers. The same questions were the same for everyone. The interview was recorded and later written down.

**The result:**

Five interviews were performed in one hour each with students from Löftadalen´s residential college for adult education. All students were 65 years old or more. The quotations mentioned are summaries and abbreviations of the respondents´ answers. Sometimes the questions are tangled in with the answers.

**Art-Age**

**Interviews with older course members at Löftadalen´s residential college for adult education**

(BS) Britta Strömbeck. Retired, own business as potters. Studying visual arts, first year

(US) Ulla Stanley. Retired, Clothing seamstress and psychiatric nurse. Studying ceramic arts, second year.

(MW) Margit Wettesten. Retired, scientist at the University of Gothenburg and Astra Zenica. Studying visual arts, third year.

(FA) Finn Aurell. Retired, architect and has worked with city planning. Graduated from his studies in 1976. He has a family with a wife and two adult children. Studying visual arts, first year.

(PS) Pia Strandberg. Retired, worked at the post office as an accounter, administrator and a manager. She also had some union and political assignments. She studied textile arts and weaving for several recurring periods.

**Interviewers:**

Teresa Bortoluzzi

Gunnar Apelgren

1. **How did you find the course you attended?**

**BS**: A former colleague and school friend has worked at Löftadalen and told me lyrically about the nice environment, skilled teachers, the good food-and the shorter and very popular weekend courses, which can be hard to come by. I joined two aquarelle courses but I really wanted to attend a long full semester, but I was too stingy at that time. I didn´t know about the school before and I didn´t know that these possibilities even existed.

**US**: I was recommended by patients. I had been at Löftadalen for study days at work and I had visited “open house” at this school.

**MW**: I met an acquaintance of mine who was allowed to join this course. I didn´t know that older applicants were admitted, I tried to get into an Art College but it is so much more expensive.

**FA**: I applied for some similar courses at other schools. There were a large number of applicants so the younger came in first. On Löftadalen´s homepage they said that older applicants were being welcomed, which convinced me to apply there.

**PS**: For personal reasons I needed to move from Gothenburg. At that time I studied at Gothenburg´s folk high school. The counselor also searched for other options than the course I attended and found a weaving course at Löftadalen´s folk high school.

1. **Why did you attend this course? What are your goals?**

**BS**: I have been working with ceramics my whole life and the last year I have felt a resistance towards the clay, it has been hard. Now I want to broaden and deepen myself artistically. I want to find other expressions than ceramics. There is a lot of technical knowledge in ceramics- in aquarelle you can do what you like. If it doesn´t work the first time you just turn the paper and start again on the other side. Then you just don´t know what will happen. Can you change your career when you´ve retired?

**US:** I have always been creative and I have attended evening classes in ceramics. I want to do something new and serious once more in my life, as a retired person. I have stayed at a folk high school and I have been married to a teacher.

**MW:** I have attended mini courses and I want to get a better grounding, learn how to view things. You need to know how perspective and other things work in iconographic and after that you can ignore it if you want to.

**FA:** I want to improve myself. I need to join others to get a context where you can discuss Art and exchange views. Painting is a search and to make us understand. Art in itself, it is fun to work and explore new things and techniques. Education is fun since you get assignments and challenges.

**PS:** I want to break with the parts of my life that have been destructive.

1. **Have you been engaged in creative activities before?**

**BS**: Yes, my whole life.

**US**: Yes, couture. First I thought there were too many techniques here at the ceramics course but I discovered later that it was necessary. Now when I attend the second year I can work more freely with what I want.

**MW**: Tie-dye, vegetable dyeing when I was at home with my children. I liked drawing as a child. I have never regretted my career as a scientist; it has been so much fun. I didn´t have any special expectations from my parents. My best friend went to the College of Design and Crafts in Gothenburg. My husband went to the same school so art was near. Earlier I went to an aquarelle course three hours per week but it was too little.

**FA**: I have drawn croquis and attend aquarelle courses. It is important to be in a group, having a context.

**PS**: I was sewing a little. My mother and grandmother wove. When I was a child I helped them with some fragments.

**4.What did you know about visual arts, ceramics or textile arts before you came to this school?**

**BS**: Since I am a ceramic I have always been in a circle of creative people but how to create visual arts I really had no idea.

**US**: My daughter has attended the College of Design and Crafts so I knew a lot about ceramics and textiles.

**MW**: I have tried some shorter courses in ceramics and drawing, collected colourful yarns without doing anything with it.

**FA**: Well versed, I have also read some art history.

**PS**: Almost nothing, except for my mother´s and grandmother´s weaving.

**5.If you weren´t a student at this school what would you do instead?**

**BS**: It´s a hard question, simply being bored. I´m not longing for passivity. I need some structure in my life. I can imagine working in a movie theatre a few days a week. I can get very tired after one day. I study on Mondays, Tuesdays, free on Wednesdays, study on Thursdays and Fridays. My studies here I see as repetition and training even though I am retired.

**US**: I would commit myself to something else, the church; learn some languages and so on. I would write about my life, attend a writer´s course.

**MW**: I would draw, not attend any gym or play golf, not sit at home and wait for something to happen. I feel much freer in the evening when I have been in school than I´ve been at home all day. I want to find structure in existence, accustomed to labor discipline from a fairly free job. I liked better to go off to work. You keep track on what day it is.

**FA**: I was planning to attend other courses. I want to draw. I don´t want to stay at home and do nothing.

**PS**: I own a weaving house where I work with everything I have been taught here at Löftadalen. I have some exhibitions and I´m joining markets.

**6.Do you think the cost will prevent many older people from studying?**

**BS:** Travelling expenses, otherwise it´s cheap. I don´t think that the cost is the problem. Not everyone wants to participate in creating art, they have other interests.

**US**: Many people don´t know that it is rather cheap or they don´t know that you can participate in longer courses at folk high schools. Older people have been taught to save money from their childhood.

**MW**: No, many retired people prioritize other things, e g travelling. Many older people have a richer society life. Many don´t know about the possibilities to attend a folk high school and to what low prize it actually is.

**FA**: I know some people who are taking courses.

**PS**: No.

**7.How does the world around you and your relatives look upon your participation in school?**

**BS**:Very differently, some find it fantastic. Others don´t react at all.

**US**: Everyone think it´s good. My children are themselves in the same line of business. I feel like I have the support from those around me.

**MW**: My husband and my grown up children like the fact that I am attending courses, I have a strong support.

**FA**: In a positive way. My wife doesn´t want to retire either and not do anything. She is also interested in arts and developing herself.

**PS**: My first husband went mad, he had an opinion that “what you haven’t learnt when you finish school is not worth learning”. I think that it´s a difference in men´s and women´s reactions when someone starts studying. When women start studying later in life men are scared that they´re establishing a new set of friends and that they commit to something and become active. I think they´re scared of losing control, that the safety and the habitual disappear.

**8.Do you have any opportunity to work with your assignments at home or somewhere else?**

**BS**: I can work with screen prints in my workshop. Can I get access to a workshop here?

**US**: I can work elsewhere.

**MW**: I have a small studio at home. But it will be different with a proper studio.

**FA**: Yes, but it´s boring to sit on your own, not having a context.

**9.What do you think about this school´s environment, mixed ages, goals etcetera?**

**BS**: I think it´s so inspiring with this mixture. I am actually afraid of young people. But the boys here are so nice. I have taught myself that young people aren´t so dangerous after all. I have heard that young people can be afraid of older people. I see this as a pause in life, an opportunity to reflect. To think about what you want to do later on.

**US**: It´s stimulating with different ages and the enthusiasm from the young ones. We live in an age segregated society but here generations can meet without any family ties. I keep out of psychiatry, I don´t want to get into other people´s problems. I want to concentrate on myself, don´t want to be too restricted I want to feel free. Sometimes I want to have some structure in my life and sometimes I just want it to be unstructured.

**MW**: It´s really good to have mixed ages I have often been too old in different situations. I was twice as old as my friends at the university. I have tried courses for pensioners but I didn´t like it. It´s good to see how other age groups are thinking. My medical students were fairly well adjusted, I only met those in my group. I want to see other types of people. I´m rather old in the younger eyes. Those who are younger than me are not that much younger while those who are older are much older. You don´t feel so old but like always.

**FA**: Good, it may well be even older people. The education is not so formal and you can eat and have some coffee with the teachers and continue interesting conversations. At the university the distance between students and teachers is bigger.

**PS**: This is the best alternative for adult education. The younger and the older contribute to one another with their experience and knowledge. The young make the old more alert and prevent them from falling asleep and the old give of their life experience.

**10.Is there a difference in being creative between young and old (life experience, the ability to put new knowledge in another context, etcetera)?**

**BS**: There is a huge difference. I can assimilate the education very well. Work discipline. As self-employed you are not used to great resources, computers, copy machines and other equipment. The ability to put new knowledge in a new context, add new experiences to the old ones. There are not so many rules these days. Draw from a picture, you were not allowed to do that when I was young. The more you keep at it the more you understand how difficult it can be but it is as fun all the time. Learn how to portray, learn about new materials and techniques. How should one define art, does art need to be innovative or could one place oneself in a given artistic tradition? Learn terminology so you can talk about art.

**US**: I think there is a difference. As a young person you have another faith in the future. I know I am getting closer to death, at the very best I can get another twenty years. As a young person you dare more and you have another approach. Experience can be both positive and negative. It is good to be able to predict things but at the same time it might be inhibitory. As an older person I can add the new experience to the old. One should not accumulate too much stuff. There are solutions for everything. As an older person you don´t have to seek your identity by performing for others. As an old person you don´t have so many limitations in the artistic expressions.

**MW**: The silent knowledge, references from old, forgotten work experience that popped up. The subconscious knowledge from the past. Slower learning ability. I don´t care as much about what others think about what I do, but of course it is fun to sell a painting.

**FA**: I have more confidence now. I was more of a seeker before. I have attended courses and tried things out before. Art is like a language. You try to draw and watch what others think and then it´s a way of communicating.

**PS**: In the beginning I was locked by the idea that it should look in a special way. The teacher helped me a lot with opening my way of thinking. You think like you´ve been taught. I think it´s harder to start the older you are. You are not as open minded, you have learnt that it should look a certain way. But you might not be so afraid to make mistakes as when you were young.

**11.How important is the result compared to the feeling in being in a creative situation, to be in a creative process?**

**BS**: 50/50. You want to be satisfied, a will to go on. Drawing is both the moment and the result. I have a professional career behind me where the result always was the most important thing. When I play the accordion it isn´t important if anyone is listening. The moment can be the result.

**US**: The result is the momentum forward, but it isn´t the most important thing.

**MW**: 50/50. You cannot just produce and never finish it. Sometimes I take out old things that I didn´t like before but now revaluate. I have to be satisfied sometimes, having a goal with my drawing even if it doesn´t turn out the way I originally imagined.

**FA**: The final result is the most important thing. You have a vision in your head of what the work of art would look like. But that mustn´t burden you, you have to be open minded so that you can follow the development of what you do. Maybe there is a difference between young and old, that older people are more open minded. Every experience in life makes it easier to accept and be open for things not turning out the way you had expected. Younger people may be more fixated with things turning out the way they expect them to do.

**PS**: It´s wonderful to be a part of the creative process but there must also be a result. Otherwise you lose the desire.

**12.How important is the education or are the given conditions (the studio, the workshops, the equipment e g) the most important thing?**

**BS**: 50/50. Education can be good but not attending a full course. You can participate in other courses´ different modules. Sometimes that is even better.

**US**: There is always something new you can learn.

**MW**: Education is not the most essential part but the dialogue with the teachers is extremely important. To meet others who are doing the same as you and talk about the same things. Education is the same as friends´ and teachers´ feedback. I listen to what the teacher is saying but I do as I like. It´s important with other people´s opinions to clarify what I want. It´s pointless with ignorant praise.

**FA**: It´s important with access to teachers and their opinions. It enriches with teachers who have a different focus and who give different answers. The practical conditions are also important.

**PS**: It is important with education, a teacher who has knowledge and someone who is in charge of the organization.

**13.How important is the teachers´ and the classmates´ feedback?**

**BS**: It´s stimulating to get views. I´m not used to that when I work alone. Now I get a more continuous response.

**US**: I don´t need that much education now when I´m a second year student but it´s good to have a teacher to ask. It´s good to have education when you´re a first year student. I´m not here to prove anything, it´s a pleasant existence.

**MW**: Both my teacher and I think I paint strange drawings, but he likes them (not all of them) and we have many interesting conversations.

**FA**: It´s important with constructive criticism. When someone says something positive you become certified to continue.

**PS**: Very important.

**14.What does lifelong learning mean to you?**

**BS**: I´m opposed to the new, e g I go to the bank to withdraw money. I feel old fashioned and endangered. Despite this I´m learning Photoshop and to make my own website (?!).

**US**: All learning provides experience and all new experience provides need of new learning.

**MW**: To be able to understand society and yourself you need to be open minded and curious about news, about what is going on and take it in. I wouldn´t like to be without my smart phone.

**FA**: I have always tried to learn new things. I went to new places and took new jobs e g. I want to have as broad a view as possible of existence, experience as many things as possible.

**PS**: It started here and now I proceed. I want to learn more. I want to go here again. You are never too old to learn new things. Weaving develops all the time; there are new materials and new design. It never ends.

**15.What is the quality of life for you?**

**BS**: PASSION is the quality of life. It´s the most important. Others may think it´s zestful to feed the pigeon in the park, it´s important that we accept people being different.

**US**: The combination between rest and stimulation. You build your life on many parts, not only on a husband and children.

**MW**: Being satisfied with your existence and life, being healthy and having your near and dear ones close by. Being in school feels health maintaining. Being in control of the weeks and the weekdays, days here are never the same.

**FA**: Doing what you are interested in together with others. The social part is important. This school is a good example of that. You learn while having exchange of others.

**PS**: Being able to attend this school. My cohabitant, good friends and being in good health, I don´t need that much more. Being able to attend this education and being asked if I want to have an exhibition, participate in markets and selling my crafts.

**16.What do you think you learn through creative work (except for mixing colors, pottery, putting up a loom etcetera)?**

**BS**: Learn how to appreciate and understand things, what money cannot buy, learn how to see, learn how to live. Escape stress. To describe is a kind of problem solving. Being able to absorb the unpredictable. When a drawing during the work process leaves one stage and becomes something else, when the drawing speaks for itself. To reflect on what is happening and be able to evaluate it.

**US**: To see things in another way, learn how to focus. You change your approach by broadening your understanding of the subject.

**MW**: To see. I feel livelier. I don´t feel any alienation. I have got different sphere to move in. That makes a difference even though I live in a social context. I don´t babysit my grandchildren. Working with science is almost the same thing, I don´t think that it´s such a big difference. Possibly when there really was some action it was such a rare thing in science. The few times when there was some action it was really worth the effort. It doesn´t have to be beautiful you just need to be satisfied with it. The similarity between science and drawing is that you need to consider what it looks like and not what you think that it looks like. Creativity with rules- Creativity with concept. Curiosity is a driving force, to constantly question.

**FA**: I get a richer life.

**PS**: I have learnt to open my eyes and my senses. I experience e g colours and see things in a different way, I discover other things and I sense and stop at things I didn´t even recognize before. I used to be so stressed out. I have also got to know the fabric in another way, what you can do with it and that you can´t force it to anything; you have to work with the material. Everything I worked with before; laws and agreements have lost its meaning. It was the same thing over and over, you tried to make changes but there was rarely any success. Weaving and handicraft make you feel satisfied; that you achieve something. I feel that I can inspire and help others in another way than I did in my work. Within handicraft there are always new ideas, you get inspired and transform expressions to own expressions at home in the studio. You constantly grow.

**17.Do you think that this education affects you as a person?**

**BS**: Yes, I feel safer. I have learnt that young people aren´t dangerous.

**US**: Not really. The daily life, that I enjoy it. This isn´t life changing. The year at Löftadalen´s Folk Highschool isn´t the most important one in my life; I have many other different years that have been very important. It shouldn´t change my life.

**MW**: No, not really.

**FA**: I get enriched both socially and in my creativity.

**PS**: I have got so much in return from this education. It has been a big turning point in my life. I succeeded in breaking with my past which was very destructive. I ended up in a context where I could grow; I got a lot of help and support from the teachers. I became whole as a person. My mother was a difficult person who couldn´t teach anything, if you were wrong she became angry. This resulted in me losing my passion for weaving and I thought that I would never weave again. But through the weaving my mother and I could start communicating and socializing again. We started changing ideas and wove together for nine years. I am so grateful for that.

**18.Do you think that this education affects the rest of your life/your life in general?**

**BS**: I get tired; long journeys. There is another kind of tiredness in your head after a day at school.

**US**: I feel that I take part in a context.

**MW**: Yes, of course!

**FA**: Yes, the quality of life and that I develop in the perception of other people´s art as well as my own.

**PS**: I wasn´t that scared to retire. At my work we had classes on how we could cope when we retire. They were always full. When my former manager who had been standing with his whip over us retired he came back the next day and wanted to have some coffee. The managers had no life outside work and thought that others should work as much as them. We pitied him. When I started here my thoughts on my former work disappeared and I was never afraid to retire since I had my weaving. Everyone who retires should start with some handicraft.

**19.What kind of qualities does your education give you?**

**US**: Structure, certain meaning, development. Bury yourself in a condition.

**PS**: Only positively. I never thought I would attend a course in weaving but the weaving has become my life. I have been ill with cancer three times while I was a student at Löftadalen´s Folk Highschool. But since I could go there on my own terms I could continue. It was very important to get up in the morning and go there. Besides you learn something. It gave me quality in my life.

**20.Will you continue being creative after finishing here?**

**BS**: There is no reason to stop, if you get tired of the material or the cost. I will invest 1, 5 years of study. My momentum can be having my own exhibitions, a new kind of professionalism, wanting to show others what I do.

**MW**: I will continue to draw when I´ve finished here at school but I don´t really know how it´s done, who will comment on my drawings in the future? I don´t have any good paint buddies. I need professional comments and feedback.

**FA**: I hope so. I haven´t painted myself before. I get enriched by having an exchange with others who reflect on my work and who give a social context. Getting exchange and discussing with others. Just like art-communication.

**PS**: Yes, I do that already.

**The abstract:**

The students have been talking a lot about art and art handicraft as a way of communicating and the need to get some exchange in the form of reflections and dialogue about their work with teachers and students. They say that their studies have changed the way they view their world, they have come to know themselves and their surrounding world better, and it has given them a quality of life. Other effects (beyond the above mentioned and knowledge acquisition and proficiency) that the participants have expressed, is a changed view on art with an increased acceptance for different art forms and expressions in parallel with increased critical attitude-finding it easier to assess and getting their own opinion on what they think about art in different forms.

The environment at school, the permissive attitude from the teachers, the mixture of different people in different ages, their background and belief in the future have attracted many older students to continue their studies in additional years beyond the planned.

The continuity in the studies is important, one night a week in a study circle is not enough. Going to school every or every other day give structure and meaning in life as a pensioner and at the same time provides a smoother flow in the artistic development.

It reminds them of a positive regularity from a former working life.

The feeling of participating in a social context, getting structure in their lives and meeting other like-minded people are recurrent traits in the interviews.

**The teacher’s ´reflections:**

Art is a non-verbal communication. When looking at Art the work of Art communicates with you and when you exert Art you communicate with others and yourself.

Through Art, music, dance etc we get access to and connect with other parts of ourselves than the logical ones. At the same time Art works as a language for the things we don´t always put into words and as a language just as important as the spoken one.

Performing Art is a part of being human, we all need to communicate. People who needs to express themselves through Art feel satisfaction from expressing themselves in a non-verbal way, that it´s even necessary to be able to feel as a whole person.

At studies in visual Arts, drawing, ceramics-and textile Arts the aesthetic learning is a postulate. “Learning by doing”. In your own creation the roads to acquired knowledge, insights and skills are being visualized.

The artistic creation can be twofold- one part is the creative process, the state you´re in when a work is being created, an experience of well-being, anxiety, curiosity, flow or other feelings. Another part is the finished result- to be satisfied with your creation and even getting acknowledgement from other people.