



## UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

### In de schaduw van het kunstwerk: art-based learning in de praktijk

Lutters, J.H.R.

**Publication date**  
2012

[Link to publication](#)

#### **Citation for published version (APA):**

Lutters, J. H. R. (2012). *In de schaduw van het kunstwerk: art-based learning in de praktijk*. Garant.

#### **General rights**

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

#### **Disclaimer/Complaints regulations**

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

## SUMMARY

This design-oriented study explores a new form of third-level art education called Art-Based Learning (ABL). Art-Based Learning is a method of learning from art rather than a way of learning about art. The following three theses give a helpful overview of the present study:

- 1) ABL is a different form of thinking.
- 2) ABL provides a way of consulting un-conventional sources of knowledge.
- 3) ABL offers an alternative didactic method for teaching art and culture in higher education.

### *A rich academic tradition*

ABL is heir to a rich academic tradition. Within this tradition, art is the starting point of thought rather than its end point. As an interdisciplinary approach, ABL may be of interest to literary scholars, theologians, philosophers, anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, film and theatre scholars, (art) historians, and other scholars working in the humanities.

First and foremost, the structure of ABL is based on the methods of cultural analysis developed by Mieke Bal, Ernst van Alphen, and Hubert Damisch. In their work, art is a highly relevant form of thought—a visual as well as a verbal form of philosophy. I have tried to adapt their approach into a workable teaching practice.

The psychoanalytical work of Christopher Bollas is a second important influence. His concept of the ‘unthought known’ is of particular interest, since it provides a useful definition of the unconscious as that which is known but has not yet made its way into thought. This enables Bollas to conceive of the imagination as a valid form of thinking.

Third, this study also relies upon the work of anthropologist Dick Hebdige. His research into adolescence employs methods from visual anthropology, making use of cultural artifacts in order to explore modern youth culture.

### *A different form of thinking*

ABL is a different form of thinking that can be subdivided into four domains. This subdivision articulates the different categories of thought, but does emphatically not lead to uniform results. Mostly, the four domains are traversed in a certain order. This method of education, however, is concentric rather than linear; certain aspects can recur at every level.

The first domain concerns the ‘questioning subject.’ According to Haanstra’s concept of authentic learning, this domain revolves around an authentic question by a student looking for insight into a certain social context. The personally relevant, topical, and therefore pertinent question serves as a starting point for a valid dialogue with a work of art.

The second domain concerns the ‘speaking object.’ The student is confronted with an artwork that reveals itself to be a speaking object. It is vital that the work of art can relate its own story, which presupposes a receptive attitude and an eye for detail on the part of the spectator.

The third domain concerns ‘possible worlds.’ The student begins a process of association based on what he has experienced, and ends up in the realm of the unthought known. Object and subject of perception merge. The artwork becomes part of a possible world.

The fourth domain concerns ‘story-telling.’ From a reader, the student has become a writer. Reception turns into production, and the scholar becomes an artist. He relates his experience of the artwork to the original question and reaches new conclusions.

### *An unconventional source of knowledge*

ABL freely makes use of unconventional sources of cultural knowledge, thereby unlocking adolescence as an interdisciplinary field of study. In order to illustrate this, I have assembled three 'trptychs' of artworks related to adolescence, the selection of which was based on the processes of the unthought known.

The first triptych is titled "The Story of Youth and Death." The adolescent manifests himself as a warrior-hero. The central panel shows Caravaggio's painting *David with the Head of Goliath* (c. 1610). To the left, we see Dino Pedriali's photograph *Autoritratto Imaginario* (1983); to the right, a still from Mathieu Kassovitz's film *La Haine* (1995).

The story of youth and death has a tragic structure, since everything revolves around the confrontation with mortality. The discovery of the infinite potential of youth is at the same time the moment one realizes that life can be over in the blink of an eye. Unsurprisingly, the dominant color in this triptych is black. Aristotle is the principal voice in the background. We get an insight into the violent world of the modern adolescent.

The second triptych is titled "The Story of the Beauty of Youth." The adolescent manifests himself as a poet. The central panel shows a literary work, Virginia Woolf's novel *Orlando* (1928). To the left and right of the central panel, we find a fragment from Shakespeare's play *As You Like It* (1599) and a still from Thomas Vinterberg's film *Dear Wendy* (2005) respectively.

This story of youth has a poetic structure and revolves around the beauty of difference. It shows how adolescence is also a period of discovering oneself as being different. The dominant color is white, and Schiller and Harold Bloom are the principal voices in the background. We get an insight into the romantic world of the modern adolescent.

The third triptych is titled "The Play of Youth." The adolescent alternately manifests himself as a tragic, poetic, or skeptical clown. The central panel shows a film, Nicholas Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955). The left panel contains a photograph by Risk Hazekamp called *Jack off Jimmy* (2001); the right panel puts on view a still from Jim Jarmusch's film *Mystery Train* (1989).

This story of youth has an ironic structure. Irony turns adolescence into a period of uncertainty and shifting values. The adolescent doesn't say what he means and doesn't mean what he says. His perspective changes constantly as he partakes in different discourses. The dominant color is now red, and the principal voice in the background is Bakhtin's. We get an insight into the forms of freedom in the world of the modern adolescent.

### *A modern didactic method*

ABL is a modern didactic method that can be used in art education and in the humanities—provided, however, that there is a didactic setting that simultaneously stimulates perception, analysis, imagination, and conceptualization. Didactics—the art of teaching—turns into mathetics—the art of learning.

The learning environment requires an open-source philosophy. The college or university no longer suffices as a location; the (virtual) museum, the cinema, the library, and the theater are vital for any attempt to engage in an intellectual dialogue with different kinds of artworks.

The teacher necessarily works from a position of 'intellectual friendship,' a term coined by postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak. His primary task is to pose provocative questions in order to initiate a productive dialogue between students and a work of art. This applies to each of the aforementioned domains.

The curriculum has been designed to stimulate integral cognitive development. It aims to encourage students to engage in disciplined close reading, clear logical reasoning, and free creative imagination. Each domain of ABL yields new information in a continual process of knowledge and insight.

As mentioned above, ABL can also be employed in the curricula of art academies, dance academies, drama academies, and music academies, especially within the field of artistic research. It offers a concrete didactic methodology that helps students and teachers integrate intellectual and artistic schooling. Moreover, graduation does not mean the end of ABL; learning from art is, after all, a form of permanent education.