



Introduction: Art in Education – Treasures Within and Treasures Between Us

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This special issue of Nordic Journal of Arts and Research is a collection of articles based on selected papers presented at the conference Art in Education held at Oslo Metropolitan university in august 2019. Our goal with the conference was to create a widely based international venue for exploring the many ways in which art becomes meaningful and powerful through ways of teaching and arts promotion. A key intention was to include both artists, academics and teachers and to stimulate encounters that cross conventional disciplinary barriers. The two partners organizing the conference were Kulturtanken: Arts for Young Audiences Norway, and the Faculty of Education at Oslo Metropolitan University. The mobilisation of both the artistic and scholarly networks of these two organizations laid the grounds for three days of stimulating interaction, art experiences and discussions.

As organizers, we were completely overwhelmed by the response to our conference invitation and the scope of the presentations that were submitted. It would seem we must have struck a nerve with researchers as well as artists. The appeal of the conference can be related to current tendencies in the fields of art and education concerning both art-based and academic ways of knowledge construction and promotion. Over the past few years, we have experienced the growing influence of scholarly directions and philosophies that attempt to bridge ways of thinking that earlier might have been seen as discordant or incompatible. Approaches embedded in both academic theorizations and artistic traditions have merged into exciting new

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directions. Some examples are practice-led research, artistic research, A/R/Tography and performative research, all touched upon by various presenters at our conference.

Our interdisciplinary aims were reflected in the programming and configuration of the conference. Art performances, a visual arts exhibition and visits to some of the most noteworthy and innovative art projects for children in the Oslo area were part the program. Our aim to highlight artistic expression, both *in* research and *as* research, meant encouraging presentation formats that go beyond traditional paper presentations as well as featuring art performances as an integrated part of the program. For the Faculty of Education at OsloMet this was a novel experience but relying on the expertise of Kulturtanken producers it was all carried out professionally and successfully.

The conference sought to deepen our understanding of issues related to art and dignity and the role of aesthetic experiences in the development of personhood, self-cultivation and sustainable living. A number of presentations focused on the power of artistic experiences as starting points for the individual and social processes that are vital to inclusion and education for democracy.

Particular attention was given to artistic and cultural encounters in school facilitated by The Cultural Schoolbag – a comprehensive national programme that since 2001 has worked to ensure that all school children in Norway experience and develop an understanding for professional art and culture of all kinds. There were several presentations discussing performances by visiting artists in schools, the participation of young people in professional artistic projects and the development of children's creative powers during regular arts classes. There was a strong focus on exploring children's own perspectives – children as receivers, co-creators or perhaps as critics of art and artistic experiences. The conference addressed issues concerning artistic content and quality in view of young people's negotiation of aesthetic capital. Presenters focused on the effects of collective art experiences on learning environments, the impact of creative joy on learning, and the power of artistic exploration.

An important initial idea of the conference was to connect art to overarching human goals as promoted through UNESCO's international appeal for the promotion of arts education and creativity in schools as outlined in the Delors Report (Delors & UNESCO, 1996) titled *Learning: the treasure within*. Here learning is connected to four pillars of education: *learning to be*, *learning to know*, *learning to do* and *learning to live together*. *Learning to be* may include learning to see through visual and other

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art forms. Indeed, this may imply that art should be given more importance in schools than is commonly the case in many countries. *Learning to live together* directs our attention to the role of art educators, artists and researchers in forming sustainable, creative and democratic learning environments. This issue was addressed by focusing on art education in a wider societal perspective, both as a value in itself, and as part of a broader educational mission in a rapidly changing and increasingly pluralistic world.

In August 2019 we had, of course, not foreseen the coronavirus pandemic looming on the horizon. Today, as we acknowledge that the pandemic will still influence our lives for months, or even years to come, we think back to the conference, seeing new relevance in many of the issues raised. On the one hand, we are filled with a longing for meeting people, for vibrant discussions and for engaging with art in real life, in galleries, performance venues and classrooms. On the other hand, the current situation makes us reflect on art and education in ways that mobilize many of the ideas, working modes and initiatives promoted at the conference.

Not least, the Covid19 pandemic has made us reflect deeply on issues concerning art and health. A wide understanding of health involves more than the absence of illness. Health concerns human well-being, which also involves the possibilities to flourish through cultural engagement, through learning and through art. Following Even Ruud (2013), engaging with art can become part of a personal health practice, even acting as a “cultural immunogen”. While no engagement with art can stop the spread of an infectious disease, there are countless accounts of how artistic practices have helped people maintain their health, and cope with the social and mental challenges surrounding both the illness itself and the lockdowns and restrictions we all have to live under.

The ten articles included in this volume are only a small selection from the more than seventy presentations and fourteen workshops held at the conference in August 2019. Their scope is wide, ranging from practice-based analyses to methodological, theoretical and political issues. Nonetheless, what characterizes all of them is that the authors see a need to value and develop art as a key practice in education, allowing children and young people to develop their artistic potential and create their own “treasures”. Additionally, as many of the authors argue, art in education is essentially an interpersonal and social endeavour that involves exploring and developing creatively not only personal enjoyment and well-being – the “treasures within” – but also our artistic interactions with others – the “treasures between us”.

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We would like to thank all those involved in the Art in Education conference in August 2019, especially colleagues and artists from abroad who contributed with valuable international perspectives, as well as the foreign embassies involved in housing our international guests. We also wish to thank OsloMet and Kulturtanken for hosting and supporting the conference and for taking care of the logistics and artistic production. Our gratitude is also extended to The Research Council of Norway for contributing to funding the conference, and not least to the mayor of Oslo, for inviting all the participants to a grand welcome in the form of a reception in Oslo City Hall, which features the art works of famous Norwegian painters.

The publication of this special issue is the result of teamwork involving many people at OsloMet, Kulturtanken and elsewhere, working together for a common goal. We would specially like to thank Christian Fjeldbu for his original artwork used in our conference material and as a cover for this issue. Our gratitude also goes to all the involved peer reviewers for their invaluable effort, and to the research groups at OsloMet who have contributed with funding in the publication process. Last but not least, we would like to thank the authors for their creative and insightful contributions to this volume, which we hope and believe may lead to further discussions and research in the same inspiring atmosphere that characterised the conference Art in Education.

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