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## Arts Education and Cultural Democracy: The Competing Discourses

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### Abstract

Arts education are understood and implemented by ways of different discourses. Following critical discourse theory, discourses are part of power strategies and they predominantly fight for dominance. What this means is that certain discourses and accompanying practices of arts education may rule and others may be subordinated or neglected. A review of current Norwegian publicly funded arrangements on arts and education shows competing discourses, which seem subordinate to a dominant Eurocentric arts institutional discourse. The general use of high art 'quality' as a nodal point in most arrangements supports the argument. Through contemporary practices of social circus outside Europe, such as *Circus du Monde*, and by an exemplar project, The Circus Lab, a collaboration between Norway and Portugal, a different discourse of cultural democracy and education (formation) is seen and expressed. This discourse seems to be less visible in the European context of publicly funded arrangements, where professional training, exposition to the cultural canons and audience participation still seem to monitor the comprehension and act as discursive triggers by

which policies are governed. Among the consequences are lost opportunities of collaborative practices between the competent adult and the competent child.

### **Introduction**

This article deals with arts education from a discursive perspective. The forms and practices of arts education in society and schools depend on the way we speak about art and education. Arts education, and all its policies and different aesthetic and social arrangements are understood, generated and maintained by different discourses. Following critical discourse theory (Fairclough, 2013) there is a close mutual relation between linguistic practice and social life and objects. Furthermore, critical discourse theory detects hierarchies of discourses, discourse orders and sub-discourses that imply power strategies and a fight for dominance (Foucault, 1973). Both ‘art’ and ‘education’ are big concepts that self-evidently hold many sub-discourses and discursive practices. In a late social semiotic and multimodal version of discourse theory (Kress, 2013), the term ‘interest’ is high-lighted to underline the constant wish to remain or develop power, and where certain interests, for example in the field of arts education, may rule and others may be subordinated or neglected. Finally, as dominant discourses compete, others may be unheard. This is underlined in poststructuralist versions of discursive thinking (Rancière, 2006a), where we may assume that dichotomies common to modernity (for example Arts or Education), conceal the understandings of the betwixt and between (arts and education, arts as education). Arts teachers—or teaching artists—may easily recognize this reality. From a Modern European perspective and from years of experience in drama education it can be asserted that discourses in arts education tend to act mutually exclusive and provincial.<sup>1</sup>

In order to investigate the dynamics of current discourses in arts education, my approach will be to review a few local, European publicly funded arrangements on arts and education. I will delimit the analysis to some main arrangements for children and young people in the Norwegian framework, seen mainly from the performance arts perspective. These are arrangements accompanied by discourses that reflect the understanding and hence the operations of policy makers and stakeholders within art and education. The pattern of discourses is complex since it is sensitive to cultural diversity; in fact, discourses create diversity. Aims and ambitions on one level of policymaking can be met by aims and ambitions at the implementation level that is driven by a different discourse. Also the different art subjects may carry different discourses, notwithstanding the difference of discourse within one discipline such as theatre.

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<sup>1</sup> Provincial in the meaning claiming universal truth from a specific localization of interest

Nevertheless, a few illustrating tendencies in the performing arts will be examined to reveal cases of discursive dominance. This will be followed by an international case study revealing a different cultural discourse and hence practices not yet widely acknowledged in the European art/education environment. I have named this the discourse and practice of cultural democracy (Adams & Goldbard, 1981; Graves, 2005; Kershaw, 1992; Neelands & O'Connor, 2010). For readers who engage in the engagement of children in arts education, this is a discourse speaking to possibilities. To this discourse belongs an understanding of the child as competent cultural agent, with a right to express, communicate and learn through available aesthetic and symbolic media. It is a comprehension which honors sensuous knowing and where the art and the artistic is subordinated to culture:

The arts—all of the arts, including objects or activities that you might not recognize as *art*, and others that you might consider artistic but have prosaic utilitarian uses for their makers— are a subset of the vastly larger project of culture. (Graves, 2005, p. 14)

### **Some Norwegian Arrangements and their Main Discourses**

It can be seen that arts practices in current Norwegian primary and secondary level public school scarcely incorporate a discourse on arts education at all. Such a discourse is subordinated to a discourse on academic skills and competencies.<sup>2</sup> The dominant educational discourse leaves arts education to occasional visits from artists or out-of-school voluntary and (for some) expensive activities. When art does exist in the curriculum, it is still accompanied by a discourse inherited from Western antiquity, a hierarchy of two educationally valid arts forms (music and visual art) and some educationally more dubious forms such as dance and theatre. Plato's fear and dismissal of theatricality and improvisatory forms still has the unmistakable implication that important forms of aesthetic communication and learning have no part in teacher education or the school curriculum. Consequently, arts in school, even in kindergartens, often play the role of pastime activities, and where the teachers' arts teaching skills are most commonly variable or inadequate, even in subjects like music, which traditionally has a more secure position in the school timetable (Sætre, Neby, & Ophus, 2016). The Cultural Rucksack provides the main encounter public schools in Norway have with the arts-program.<sup>3</sup> This is a vast effort from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture to support artists to reach every Norwegian pupil by offering approved artworks. From 2016, this program has been implemented by the institution that distributes music performances to

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<sup>2</sup> See for example the policy document <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/education/school/id1408/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.kulturradet.no/english/the-cultural-rucksack>

schools and communities: Concerts Norway, now renamed The Culture Tank (Kulturtanken).<sup>4</sup> The predominant discourse here is one of ‘democratization of culture’ (Adams & Goldbard, 1981; Kershaw, 1992), which lets all children experience and learn from their cultural heritage as well as from the content and forms of contemporary approved adult art. While there is an increasing interest in interaction and child engagement such a discourse does not really compete with the one that is centered around the interest of the professional artist, her excellent artworks and the core belief of objective quality. Hence the examples of collaborative practices between artist and pupils are scarce, the didactic and facilitative expertise is weak and the dialogue between the interests of the teacher and artist halts. This is repeatedly pointed at by evaluators (Borgen, 2003; Borgen & Brandt, 2007; Borgen & Skjersli Brandt, 2006; Ørstavik, 2016).

The Norwegian Municipal School of Performance Arts is another important and major provider of arts education. A highly regarded program initiated by pioneering music teachers in the seventies, is now realized and supported by approximately 430 municipalities all over the country. It is a voluntary and fee-based program reaching approximately 10% of all school pupils. The dominant discourse here is anchored in the UN declaration of children’s right to participate in culture, which, it is proposed, fosters the personal and social development of the child (Ulvestad, 2013). However, this admirable discourse struggles under a dominant discourse of artist training. The chosen term for ‘education’ in this instance is ‘opplæring’ which more specifically refers to ‘training.’ Traditional art forms are used for students to achieve technical mastery at a certain level, identifying and developing talent through training for the standards of public performance. This is a discourse that enlists and stimulates the child in her dream of becoming a professional artist, which is not always consistent with social formation or general education. In theatre, the pursuit of high quality performance products has even stimulated some teachers to fulfill their own dreams of being an artistic director, served through their pupils. Even if there is a growing interest in the social development of the child, play and drama is subordinated to the goal of excellent performance skills, to adult standards (Ulvestad, 2013).

In fact, the discourse of arts education as professional training is generally dominant in Norway, and underlined in a recent evaluation report on the National Centre Art and Culture in Education<sup>5</sup> (Birkeland, 2014). Here the political and social consequence of this discourse becomes manifest when it is proposed that the educational responsibility and the

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.rikskonsertane.no/#forside>

<sup>5</sup> <http://kunstkultursenteret.no/>

administration of this field should be reorganized and belong to the professional adult arts academies in Oslo who hold the expertise in arts training. These academies are seemingly anchored in the European arts institutional discourse, which implies they have little recognition of neither discourse about child culture or the competent child, nor on cultural democracy, with its political dimensions of arts as a way of knowing, learning, self-expression and empowerment.

The limited discourse of artistic training is also evident in upper secondary level public school (age 16-18) where the program of Music, Dance and Drama reaches 3.2% (2014) of all pupils. This program offers general university admissions certification, still the program also prepares for further vocational education<sup>6</sup>. Here a discourse of personal and social formation may be detected, but competes with the discourse of training and profession, often illustrated by the never-ending conceptual battle of 'drama' versus 'theatre.' What the battling discursive agents actually produce in the long term, is the prohibition of the discourse, comprehension and practices where aesthetic form-making and artistic investigation produces both art and social effect.

Overall, a brief review of the discursive order (Foucault, Faubion & Rabinow, 2001) for Norwegian arts and education reveals dominant discourses that support different interests. What I mean by this is that we detect two distinct and powerful discourses; one focusing on the dissemination of approved art to children, and one on training child talent to reach professional standards. However, these interests are together inconsistent with broader educational discourses. These art discourses come from the perspective of traditional art and mainly linked to the interest of the arts institution; training, artist support, audience building, providing high quality experiences to audiences, recruiting students etc. However, the effect of these dominant discourses is to maintain constricted notions of both art and education. Of course, to a certain extent, these discourses are well known, accepted and shared by the educational environment. After all, artists are the experts on art. The respectful attitude from the teachers only accentuates the institutional gap between art and education. On the other hand, artists often express a prejudiced and constricted notion of education, one which implies their critique on the educational ignorance of multimodal, sensuous knowing. The schools are excused because they have no interest, nor room for arts practice that is driven by a limited discourse of training the talent in the specific art subject. Furthermore, when the artists visit and disseminate their work, the teachers get their chance to have a coffee break.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.udir.no/kl06/mdd1-01/>

In this situation, the out-of-school educational arrangements, such as the municipal school of performing arts, may offer an excuse for schools not having to deal with the arts in everyday school business. Consequently, it becomes legitimate to act condescendingly, to see art as ‘just’ play—a pastime activity which “steals time” from the classroom teacher and the already overcrowded curriculum. If no ‘proper’ art-making may take place, there is only room for ‘just’ playing. What is of course missing is the discourse and practices of meaningful aesthetic learning and form-making between the professional standard and the pastime activity. This is probably one important reason why drama education still struggles to be accepted in the school environment.

This means there is no legitimate cultural discourse for the missing perspective of joint adult-child artistic-educational investigation and expression through symbolic media with a performative-educational perspective. Where do we identify skills of facilitation, learning and formation that are not subordinated within audience- and discipline skill development? Where do we find the practices where the primary goal is not to become a professional artist but an educated person? Where may we find such a discourse and understanding of arts education? For certain, it does exist within the broad field of arts education. However, it often seems to be marginalized by other dominant discourses shaping the policy of art and education. In this situation, new collaborative art forms and new ways of international collaboration may point at new possibilities.

### **A Case of Norwegian International Cultural Policy**

Over a period of 20 years, Norway has supported and co-funded many European programs within the European Economic Area (EEA) arrangement. The aim has been to reduce cultural and economic disparities, increase the understanding of cultural diversity and promote cultural exchange. This also includes a few cultural programs, amongst some dealing with art and education. I was lucky to follow the progress of one such project called *Circus Lab*<sup>7</sup> (2012-2016), based on the collaboration of Norwegian and Portuguese artistic entities within (new) circus. The meaning of ‘education’ and the educational premises for this exchange program varied considerably. While at first it simply meant involving the schools and school children two more specific meanings then became clear: firstly, language which referred to dealing with children’s ‘access to arts,’ as ‘the target audience’<sup>8</sup> or ‘reaching a broader audience,’<sup>9</sup> is closely related to the already mentioned ‘democratization of culture’ (Kershaw, 1992). This includes a wish to educate the people through the dissemination and experience of approved

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<sup>7</sup> <http://eeagrants.org/project-portal/project/PT09-0001>

<sup>8</sup> <http://pegadacultural.pt/for-whom-is-intended/?lang=en>,

<sup>9</sup> <http://pegadacultural.pt/apresentacao-publica-do-programa/?lang=en>

new and inherited artworks. In this way, democratization of culture corresponds with the dominant European classicist notion of ‘cultural heritage’, as seen in the EEA program headline of ‘protecting cultural heritage’ or in the general EU research discourse on cultural heritage.<sup>10</sup>

Secondly, and to a lesser degree, education also means access to arts in a different manner, namely the inclusion of the child: “The aim is to promote inclusion of children and youth and interest for culture at an early age.”<sup>11</sup> Such utterances reveal a different discourse than revealed in the Norwegian setting, and closer to cultural democracy, one which also has stronger reference to late modern performance studies and child culture studies. The first discourse is reception focused, ensuring the interests of the professional artist who may educate the child audience through awesome and groundbreaking performances. The second is agency focused, ensuring the interest of the child, where the artistic expert becomes the one who facilitates the child experiencing and communicating by working in artistic media.

The *Circus Lab* project set out to “create synergies between artistic entities, schools, and local agents,<sup>12</sup>” “integrate art education into compulsory education curricula in Portugal,<sup>13</sup> and urged for “meaningful engagement in arts.”<sup>14</sup> These utterances are first and foremost all familiar to discourses of both cultural dissemination and active participation in the democracy. They are furthermore united in the wish to repair the lack of aesthetic and cultural education in European schools. Nevertheless, the different discourses cause different practical implications of integration and including the arts and people. First, ‘integration’ here means the increased contact between schools and artistic entities providing educative shows, a marked and opportunity for the artist and the effort to increase the audience for art. Secondly, ‘integration’ also meant the inclusion of the child as performer and meaning-maker through artistic participation, perhaps also the inclusion of teachers of art subjects such as circus in the everyday school curriculum. This last understanding is typically less articulated, because it easily collides with the influential educational discourse<sup>15</sup> where arts earn relatively little educational value.

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<sup>10</sup> See Horizon 2020 Work Program:

[http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/wp/2016\\_2017/main/h2020-wp1617-societies\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/wp/2016_2017/main/h2020-wp1617-societies_en.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <http://eeagrants.org.stage.07.no/News/2013/Funding-for-cultural-exchange>

<sup>12</sup> <http://pegadacultural.pt/for-whom-is-intended/?lang=en>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.teatroviriato.com/en/calendar/circus-lab/#sthash.WnpTFBAX.dpuf>

<sup>14</sup> <http://eeagrants.org/programme/view/PT09/PA17>

<sup>15</sup> See footnote 14

A third approach of integration and collaboration in the Circus Lab project is noteworthy, in that it produced workshops and performances with school children where the professional artist and the child performed on stage on approximately equal terms. This is a way of approaching arts education that maintains the status of both the artist and the child, and places both within the notion of cultural democracy. This approach was built on the Portuguese experience<sup>16</sup> as well as selected Norwegian circus practice.<sup>17</sup> However, this form of collaboration is not very familiar in the donor country Norway and other countries where the discourses of approved and canonical art for children tend to overrule the discourse on agency and participation. In spite of this culturally democratic approach, even in the Circus Lab project, the dominant artist-centered discourse could be seen in the collaborations where the circus artist kept the main role both on and off stage and used the children as extras (more or less) to fulfill his or her intention. This is one way of controlling artistic quality that actually compromises quality as understood in the discourse of cultural democracy. Of course, for a shy child it can be powerful and educative just to cross the stage or to be part of a stage ensemble without any other artistic challenge. However, it takes a different democratic approach and respect to include the child as an agent within the circus medium. This also includes acknowledgement of facilitation. The best collaborative projects and performances in Portugal revealed facilitative and didactic expertise, including context sensitivity, a dramaturgy comfortable with staging the imperfect and securing a strong child presence and mastery that is capable of wiping out the difference between the professional and the child.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Hidden Discourse**

Following this Portuguese experience, in order to realize best practices of collaboration, one may have to overcome the provincialism of conflicting discourses. This seems to be a hard challenge to the Norwegian arrangements presented above, which rest on a seemingly Eurocentric notion of arts practice and arts education. In a global context, however, there is apparently a less dichotomist view on art and education. This is of course a simplified assertion because European arts discourses also exist in other continents. However, the noticeable basis and premise for such practices of ‘social circus’ has recently been spread and gained increased importance through practice and research in many non-European regions such as Canada, Australia, US and Africa. One marked example is the longstanding *Circus du Monde*-project initiated by *Cirque du Soleil*<sup>19</sup> and its spreading in ca. 80 communities in 25

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<sup>16</sup> For example “Teatro Viriato”, Viseu

<sup>17</sup> Circus Xanti <http://www.cirkusxanti.no/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://vimeo.com/152037604>

<https://www.facebook.com/acert.pt/photos/a.1266723493354113.1073741985.117533524939788/1266724070020722/?type=1&theater>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.cirquedusoleil.com/en/about/global-citizenship/social-circus/cirque-du-monde.aspx>



countries (Lafortune, 2010; Spiegel, Breilh, Campana, Marcuse & Yassi, 2015 ). Here, training the youth in circus skills while at the same time providing social empowerment and learning becomes evident and powerful. The work is thus both pedagogical and cultural, focusing on inclusion and collaboration between agents of culture. This activity is examined by an increasing research effort, for example (Rivard 2007; Rivard, Bourgeault, Mercier 2010), not least through the Canadian project *Arts for social change*<sup>20</sup> (Spiegel 2014; Yassi, Spiegel, Lockhart, Fels, Boydell, Marcuse 2016). In this material a discourse of cultural democracy is evident, also further developed and nuanced following empirical analyses. Even if social circus programs “show some success in equipping participants with life skills” (Yassi et al 2016, 58), social and cultural agency is a complex matter, for example when social inclusion is the issue:

Focusing on social inclusion can efface broader structural hierarchies, values, and processes of exclusion, while promoting ‘cultural democracy’ can, inadvertently or otherwise, encourage participation in creative processes in a manner that merely pushes authoritarian dynamics to a higher structural level, entraining neo-liberal subjectivity in the service of self-expression and self-disclosure. (Yassi et al., 2016, 51)

Notwithstanding these important objections, the best case performances and performance processes in the Portuguese *Circus Lab* revealed the combined intertwined effect of artistic skills and life skill, as proposed in the Cirque du Soleil Community Worker’s Guide (Lafortune 2010). This is an effect I claim is only possible with an accompanied discourse and approach to the arts as cultural democratic languages.

The discourse of cultural democracy and a following combined social and aesthetic educational practice is so far underdeveloped in a Norwegian context, due to competing discourses within a frame of traditional pedagogy and European aesthetics. The discourses involved seem to be mutually exclusive, preventing the aesthetic outside the arts institutions, preventing the educational in the artistic environment. The Norwegian artist would for example simply hesitate to apply the concept of ‘social circus,’ fearing the non-proper art and the reduction of artistic status.

Moreover, projects like the above mentioned Canadian *Arts for social change* also seem unlikely in a Norwegian context, due to the seemingly incompatible discourses of art and science. There is currently a lack of a valid language that supports crossover projects that

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.icascc.ca/>

bridges art practice and cultural development with rigorous research. Again, what is needed is discursive reform; calling attention to the discourse of arts education as one of cultural democracy, engagement, learning and opportunity, as well as the discourse of arts based research (see for example, Barone & Eisner, 2011; Irwin, 2013; Liamputtong & Rumbold, 2008).

The exception that nuances my assertion of unproductive split discourses may be found in two minor Norwegian public arrangements, where artistic training is actually subordinated to the right to expression and the formative affect of practicing arts. The first is the non-degree granting colleges (Norwegian Folk High Schools, age 18-22)<sup>21</sup> that reach 10% of the population aged 19. These schools provide a one-year study normally undertaken between compulsory schooling and further studies. While few schools serve as feeder schools for artistic vocational training, the majority apply the arts as media for personal and social growth.

The second arrangement is the annual Norwegian Youth festival of Art,<sup>22</sup> involving ca. 1800 selected participants age 13-18. Here young people are invited to perform and communicate as amateurs, supporting the expression of youth culture and building on the interest and often self-developed competencies in a variety of cultural media. While the discourse of talent and training also may be detected here, these arrangements are noticeably driven by a discourse of cultural democracy, where ‘education’ does not include training for certification or is perhaps not included at all. However, the competition part in the Youth festival is easily linked to the recruitment of new professional artists. What is important to both arrangements however is that ‘education’ is disconnected from the traditional meaning shared in schools and arts training; predominantly acquiring certain prearranged discipline knowledge. These arrangements support life exercise and growth beyond the formal curriculum of art or education.

### **The Example of ‘Quality’**

In Norway, ‘quality’ is one of the most powerful concepts or ‘nodal points’ (Carpentier & Spinoy, 2008, Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001) in the professional artist-driven discourse. The above repeated statements of ‘approved’ art or sanctioned, even so-called objective standards, is the steering strategy for most funded arrangements. Despite its woolly and flexible meanings ‘quality’ often controls the funding and hence the type of practices for and as arts (in) education. This is evident in the current Norwegian research

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<sup>21</sup> [http://www.folkehogskole.no/?page\\_id=44](http://www.folkehogskole.no/?page_id=44)

<sup>22</sup> <http://ukm.no/about-ukm/>

project particularly on this concept, initiated by the Arts Council, where it becomes clear that the investigation predominantly values diversities within the frame of the individual artist and her artworks, in other words quality within the optic of the European arts institution and production (Lundemo, 2016). This is a delimitation that attaches little value to the kinds of cross-over practices and discourse which this article wishes to highlight. How can the cultural authorities initiate and fund the facilitation of cultural practice with children when quality is restricted to professional criteria of artworks? They cannot and this discourse is used to disqualify cultural practices that are not controlled and owned by the professional artist and traditions belonging to high art.

In the same manner, quality has become the important buzzword when art and education is evaluated in Norway. However, in the recent report made by professor Ann Bamford (2012) quality is redefined rather in relational terms. This means that quality is not solely linked to the artwork but also to processes of collaboration and interaction. The criteria of quality where arts education is concerned include active partnerships between all partners, shared responsibility, and emphasis on collaboration (p. 41). When such criteria are not met, it can be understood precisely from the discursive perspective. If partners in arts and education speak different and restricted languages, shared responsibility and collaboration may be hard or even unwanted.

### **The Discursive Confusion and Unproductive Trenches: A Conclusion.**

Now, the reader at this point may object to this proposition, preferring to recognize that Norway seems to be implementing a public policy that regards culture and arts as important to the wellbeing and education of children. The reader may argue that discourses and variations of the meaning of art and education are all covered in different funding arrangements making one impressive whole. Given this, what is the problem? Well, the current situation may be argued to be one of compartmentalization and fragmentation with split discourses occurring within an order. This has driven entrenched and defensive behavior that inhibits collaboration and sharing in the following ways:

The municipal school of performing arts is predominantly based on training the talent. The *Cultural rucksack* is audience-directed, providing entertainment and aesthetic experience. The youth festival nurtures agency and self-directed expression. The limited arts subjects in school provide recreation more than learning. What is revealed is the absence of a coherent discursive overview that would serve a less antagonistic cultural policy and expose new possibilities. When such an overview is missing, the absence only seems to serve stability and the interests of political parties, the ministries involved and the current cultural policies that includes the cultural hierarchy and the split between art and education.

As a wider consequence, the cultural policy and its implementation create fertile soil for ongoing construed antagonism and narrow interests. Demarcated discourses protect vested interests of separated institutions. As they do this, the discourses also justify the same separate institutions. In this way I claim the discourse of the Ministry of Culture revolves around artistic excellence and the interests of professional artists, and is less interested in education or children as cultural agents. At the same time the Ministry of Education is able to evade its responsibilities to arts education by placing the arts at the bottom of their priority list. There is a lack of communication on culture and education between the two ministries, and a missing common discourse.

This article does not aim to cover all discourses in use in the arts environment. If one looks closely, one will also easily find a significant instrumental discourse, supporting the arts as tool for learning 'proper' curriculum content. One will even find an increasing neo-liberalist discourse, as also reminded in the above mentioned Canadian research, often linked to the arts industry and associated education. What has been the main effort is to render probable how some dominant discourses, from a Norwegian perspective, complete the stage and seek to unite while others, such as a discourse on cultural democracy, are marginalized.

While it can be asserted that Eurocentric discourses in arts tend to act mutually exclusive and provincial it must also be acknowledged that the discourse for more integrated culture languages and education is more often heard outside Europe, in cultures like the Canadian, Australian, African, South-American or Asian. The discursive and political problem that this article addresses is therefore not a problem specific to Norway, but potentially to a European-Western culture that carries a longstanding archaic policy of art and education. This is a policy that may inhibit cultural democracy and would be unlikely to support for example Ecuador's social circus program, sponsored by the country's Vice President and one of the world's largest government-sponsored programs, reaching almost 25,000 people annually. This public arts education program promotes social solidarity and inclusion, and targets street-involved youth, as well as children from marginalized communities and adults with disabilities (Spiegel, Breilh, Campana, Marcuse & Yassi, 2015). Such programs, supported by a discourse of cultural democracy, point at possibilities for European democracies facing marginality and diversity.

By looking into the dominant Norwegian public arrangements for art and education, it is clear that art, education and arts education take part in power strategies that often conceal other discourses more often found outside the European cultures. While I am not at all suggesting that Portugal is outside Europe, it was here, in the area of contemporary circus, that I found interesting attempts of cultural democratic practice that challenges the prominent artist-centered discourse that often reduces participating children to assistants, passive audience or a

niche market. There are evidently also in Norway good examples of collaborations between professional artists and performing amateurs and children, but my aim has been to argue how and why such kinds of collaboration within a cultural democracy framework is not more often seen and funded in public arrangements.

What is needed are informed discourses that shape and legitimize more of these practices whose theoretical principles can be found for example in pragmatic aesthetics or through multimodal discourse theory. These are relevant philosophical platforms, which allow us to speak of aesthetic quality, health and wellbeing, community development, social innovation and enterprise and learning in the same sentence. What is needed is a discursive power that breaks with the myth that it is European artistic and elitist genius that represents the creativity of the people who is taken up with industrial labor. One final initiative, for the further discussion, might be to suggest a discourse which

- underlines that making art or training for mastery in a discipline is a learning process beyond learning the artistic skills.
- underlines that the artist-teacher must own artistic mastery even at the instrumental level where no great art works are produced.
- underlines communication training, not only for pleasing or convincing the audience but for the development of the agent that experiences and learns through communicative exercises.
- underlines both the sensuous and the sensible, the expert and the facilitator, the process and the product.
- speaks of art facilitation and didactics, not in a condescending way, but simply as a concept for the cultural-educational appropriation of demands, forms, dramaturgies, in different specific context: age, level of experience, cultural traditions and more.
- asks for child competency, not only arts competency when dealing with arts education.
- claims that all writers, dancers, singers, art makers etc. do not become professional authors, but writing, dancing, singing, art making etc. is nevertheless important to people at all levels as crucial cultural democratic –i.e. inclusive and exploratory practice.
- regards aesthetic practice and the aesthetic beyond the borders of established arts, including the aesthetic and performative presence and ways of staging social life.
- argues for arts in mandatory schools, and not only in voluntary educational facilities. The arts provide potential ways of knowing and learning on the same level as, but different from, other symbolic communication such as reading, writing and arithmetic. Not all expressive forms suit all children, but to be culturally educated means more than enjoying the cultural heritage. It means that every child in the nation should master at least one form of aesthetic form- making and communication, besides

reading and writing. And, all forms of cultural media should be available and treated equally.

To be culturally educated requires more than being exposed to the cultural canons and/or participate as an audience. It means to find meaning in life by participating in cultural expressive media. If we would like to avoid the school dropouts and disengaged youth, we need to provide new motivation through alternative ways of learning, engagement and mastery. It is not done by increasing the scholarly effort or by reducing the arts. Only an alternative discourse may alter this situation. This is how we shape a real cultural democracy; one where the arts are included and the opportunity for children to be artists and learn through the arts are included.

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**Bjørn Rasmussen** is professor in drama and theatre at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), department of Arts and Media Studies. He is a leading researcher and teacher in drama/theatre education and has for many years co-developed and joined networks at the national, Nordic and international level. His contributions vary from public debates on arts education issues to theoretical research on the epistemological and therapeutic potential of theatre, pragmatic aesthetics, and arts-based research. He supervises on post-graduate level, acts as international reviewer, and runs research projects such as «Drama, theatre and democracy» (2014-2017). Amongst the latest works are *Teater som danning (Theatre as formation)*, Fagbokforlaget (2013); *The art of researching with art: Towards an ecological epistemology*, Applied Theatre Researcher (2014); and *The absent recognition of heteronomous arts education*, in: The Routledge International Handbook of the Arts and Education (2015). Contact: Bjorn.rasmussen@ntnu.no



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