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## New and Different: Student Participation in Artist-School Partnerships<sup>1</sup>

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**Tatiana Chemi**

Department of Learning and Philosophy, Aalborg University,  
Kroghstræde 3, 9220 Aalborg, Denmark

### **Abstract**

The present contribution addresses the topic of school learning enhanced and extended by means of artistic methods and approaches. In the context of broader school reform in Denmark, new opportunities emerged for schools to partner with cultural institutions that are external to schools but informally involved in learning processes. Among a variety of external partners—such as sports clubs, entrepreneurs, cultural clubs-artists and cultural institutions were chosen as the focus of the research project Culture Laboratory. The qualitative study that documented and assessed the nine artist-school partnerships within Culture Laboratory showed a large number of learning outcomes, as reported by the main participants (students, teachers, artists, cultural institutions). This chapter will first of all describe the general context and purpose of the overall research project. Secondly, it will elaborate on a specific set of findings, which demonstrate a particular emotional response in the students' experience: emotional arousal. This response is described as surprising, exciting, novel and different, and brings with it a number of learning outputs.

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<sup>1</sup>The present contribution is an elaborated and revised version of a research report published in Danish (Chemi 2017b). The translation from Danish is mine.

### 3.1 Something New in the State of Denmark

In 2014, the Danish school system had to deal with the introduction of a brand new school reform. Amongst the several changes outlined, one in particular has provided schools with an unexpected opportunity to collaborate with cultural institutions and artists: the Open School. This change consisted in a clear expansion of the schools' cultural framework through activities and projects that could more systematically bring art and culture to schools and schools to cultural institutions. This action is not just about a new organisation of teaching, but rather about a whole new view of learning and art, and therefore about new dilemmas. As early as 2015, the national association of Danish municipalities, KL (2015), published a guide to the Open School, but the publication did not specifically focus on cultural or artistic partnerships, instead applying a broader understanding of partnership as collaboration with sports institutions, clubs and entrepreneurs. The school reform, which was adopted in 2013 and came into force in August 2014, demanded forms of cooperation that opened the school to the surrounding local community. According to that part of the reform called the Open School, schools were not only expected but explicitly requested to work more systematically with local organisations such as sports associations, business or entrepreneurial environments, after-school cultural projects or so-called culture-schools (*kulturskoler*). This aimed to create for primary schools “a framework for experience, immersion and enlightenment, so that the students would develop knowledge and imagination and gain confidence in their own opportunities and a background for action” (Ministry of Education 2017, my translation from Danish). The relevance of this case lies in the novelty of the political initiative, making it possible to investigate the early steps of formalised artist-school partnerships, in a socio-cultural context that has valued the arts as learning opportunities over an extended period of time.

In my previous research (Chemi 2014, 2015) I have noticed that, in collaborative practices between artists and schools, uncertainty affects teachers and educators as well as artists. Teachers are often unsure of what students should learn, how to organise their schedule, what their role should be in partnerships with artists and how to evaluate children's learning. Even though they value the arts as experiential and pedagogical tools, they still might not feel comfortable in introducing the arts throughout the curriculum. On the artists' part, uncertainties are most commonly about their role in the partnership and about their art: does art and creation drown in learning goals and frameworks? Is art to be exploited for other purposes than the artistic?

Should the artist be a teacher? Previous research projects (Chemi 2014) have documented what happens when art is integrated into teaching and how schools can create good learning environments by focusing on artistic, aesthetic and creative methods. On the one hand, the projects show that there is great benefit in making more room for the arts in school; on the other hand, a specific challenge is thrown up: the cultural encounter between the ways of thinking of schools and artists. These approaches can be so different that partnerships can be impossible to carry on. Will, commitment, passion for the arts must be present for both parties. The problem is that the two parties are often ignorant of each other: many practitioners like the idea of a different school that contains the aesthetic, bodily, emotional and sensory elements, but how are they supposed to achieve that?

The standard curriculum of the *practical-musical* subjects (as defined in the Danish *Folkeskole*) seems unambitious, with its narrow focus on sports, visual arts/design and music. Compared to Anglo-Saxon countries where one can find as compulsory subjects drama/performance and dance, both Danish *Folkeskole* and teacher education are far from offering a wide range of basic artistic skills. For example, drama in Denmark is often covered by other school subjects, such as Danish or foreign languages, and dance is usually included in gymnastics, sport and movement. Artist-school partnerships or integration of art in interdisciplinary education are mostly left to the individual teacher's will and competencies, often obtained through hobbies rather than teacher education. Collaboration with artists can be experienced as difficult because, among other things, teachers often lack skills in what I define as arts integration (Chemi 2014), and which is an internationally recognised practice (Marshall & Donahue 2014). Arts-integrated projects that aim at enhancing the quality of participation in artistic experiences and at the incorporation of different forms of art into the schools' core curriculum appear to be a kind of add-on in Denmark. Teachers who are willing to prioritise experiential or experimental teaching are often *brokers* for arts-integrated projects. The arts-integrated activities are often project-based and collaborative, make use of group work and interdisciplinary relations, and engage the students' own strengths, their senses, well-being and emotions. Arts-integrated projects can be designed against the background of a wide variety of art forms and teaching methods and are experienced by artists, children and teachers as both challenging and engaging.

In the context offered by the 2014 school reform and the opportunities defined by the Open School, I carried out a study that aimed to document and evaluate a broad development project that took place in Funen (*Fyn*) between

January 1, 2016 and June 30, 2017. The present contribution sums up selected findings from the research publication that, so far, has been published only in Danish (Chemi 2017b) and that disseminates the multiplicity and wide reach of artistic partnerships with schools.

### **3.2 A Laboratory for the Arts and Culture**

The development project called Culture Laboratory (*Kulturens Laboratorium*) was originally designed by a team of visionaries in the region of Funen. From autumn 2014, an on-going conceptualisation around the project's aims and possibilities took the form of dialogue between the region and myself as a researcher, invited to take part as an expert in arts-based learning and informal sparring partner. It was decided that the development project should cover nine partnerships that would be formed between a school, an artist and a cultural institution, and each party's contribution would be documented qualitatively. Research data were to be gathered from the nine partnerships, from April 2016 to December 2016. During this period, artistic activities were implemented, documented, mapped and analysed.

The Culture Laboratory has become reality within the economic, organisational and content framework that the Cultural Region of Funen has made available. According to Danish policy measures, a cultural region is "one or more municipalities that have concluded a cultural agreement with the Ministry of Culture" (Ministry of Culture 2017, my translation from Danish). Funen's agreement focused on dialogue between art, culture and school as educational institutions. This meant that political backing was explicit and not merely symbolic: actions were taken against the background of a growing awareness around the positive role of the arts for learning.

Several arguments provided a solid background for the project. At international level, UNICEF's children's rights declaration stipulates that all children have the right to art and cultural experiences, as clearly stated in Article 31: "Children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities" (UNICEF 1989). Similar arguments are described in the Strategy for Young Children's Encounter with Arts and Culture (Ministry of Culture 2014), where the need to look into children's involvement in cultural and artistic communities was determined and made public. The Ministry of Culture's strategy for the encounter of children and young people with art and culture, launched in May 2014, called for a qualitative study of how aesthetics are part of children's everyday lives – specifically, with a study of artist-school partnerships. The Culture

Laboratory project was established to meet this requirement. The project's purpose was to investigate qualitative trends in the use of art and culture in schools. In addition, the project aimed at getting closer to good examples that could inspire regional and national future experiences, and at getting acquainted with the strengths and dilemmas in the integration of arts and culture in schools. The research project offered a qualitative survey based on the nine selected cases of school cooperation with the arts and culture.

The originality of the project lies in the multifaceted perspective that accommodates all learning perspectives: students, teachers, artists and cultural institutions. Diversity is also expressed in the research design, which covers several geographical areas in the region, multiple art forms, different school stages (early years – K9, intermediate years – about 10–12 years old, senior years – about 13–16 years old), and various activities and organisations. The research study was based on previous experiences with similar evaluations of art and culture (Chemi 2014), mapping cultural offers in learning environments, pedagogical research using quantitative as well as collaborative data and the possibility of developing educational inspirational materials. Unlike other contributions on partnerships and the Open School, the current contribution aimed at adding to the qualitative diversity by highlighting the participants' reactions, by looking closely at the specific elements of the artistic and cultural activities, and by focusing on the general and specific prerequisites for learning and the special contribution of arts and culture to learning outputs.

### 3.3 Partnership: What's in a Name?

The Danish National Network of School Services (Nationalt Netværk af Skoletjenester 2015, 2016a, 2016b) has been the initiator of several mappings within the Open School area and artists' or cultural institutions' partnerships with schools. Each contribution has had a particular focus on a specific dilemma, such as transportation between school and cultural institutions, or schools' use of educational facilities and partnerships. The 2016 mapping (Nationalt Netværk af Skoletjenester 2016a) has contributed both qualitatively and quantitatively to the knowledge of various Danish initiatives and experiences. That research publication also disseminated useful resources that are continuously made available by municipalities in order to facilitate the workings of partnerships.

In the 2016 publications we also find a variety of definitions of the word *partnership* (2016a, pp. 13–16). The Culture Laboratory project did not

explicitly define what a partnership is or should be and the interpretation was, in the end, left to the concrete practices of sub-projects. It is thus possible to observe that a general understanding of the concept of partnership has emerged from practice. Here, a partnership was seen as a binding and equal collaboration among three parties – a school, an artist, a cultural institution – whose purpose was to conceive, design and carry out engaging educational programmes for children in primary school, based on the children’s encounter with the arts and professional artists, as well as with culture and professional cultural agents.

### **3.4 The Arts Education Tradition**

The theoretical framework behind this study is the now-established tradition of arts and arts-based education, which is outlined in the introductory chapter of the present special issue. Its core concept is Gardner’s pivotal idea of *participation in the arts*, which owes to Nelson Goodman’s (1976) theory of symbols, where the arts are seen as complex and engaging understanding. According to Gardner, “participation in the artistic process” (Gardner 1994a, p. xii) is an accessibility of both physical and logistic nature (children having the concrete opportunity to experience art and culture), but also of mental and emotional nature: the cultural and artistic offerings are developed for, with and by children and are meaningful in the child’s life and significant for the child’s development. The concept of active engagement in the arts is influenced by Gardner’s pluralistic understanding of the child’s intelligence (Gardner 1994b). Gardner seems to suggest, on one hand, a broader look at participation in the arts, which can be based on active making or active appreciation, and on the other hand, a wider understanding of intelligence that includes the aesthetic, sensory and bodily dimensions. According to Gardner (1994a), when children have artistic experiences they participate actively in a process that is *per se* educational, because “the arts create expectations and then resolve or violate them, and by doing so they stimulate complex intellectual responses that integrate both affection and cognition” (Chemi, Jensen & Hersted 2015, p. 97). Moreover, art and cultural subjects offer an aesthetic form of recognition that characterises creative processes (Gardner 1993, Csikszentmihalyi 1996). This form of recognition can lead to self-esteem and flow experiences (Csikszentmihalyi 1990), which in turn can lead to industrial or social innovations. By ensuring the accessibility of art and culture for school children, society invests in robust, innovative and competent people.

These arguments are recurring in the scholarly tradition of arts and arts-based education studies (Bresler 2007, Fleming, Bresler & John O’Toole 2015, Sefton-Green, Thomson, Jones & Bresler 2011, Schonmann 2015, Berggraf Sæbø 2016) and can be the basis of advocacy for the arts (Bamford 2006), of research-based argumentation for learning outputs (Deasy 2002; Fiske 1999; Rabkin & Redmond 2004) or of sceptical investigation of the inner workings of participation in the arts in relation to learning outcomes (Winner, Goldstein & Vincent-Lancrin 2013). Amongst the large-scale studies that inspired the present research was that of Davies et al. (2013) which evaluated *Curriculum for Excellence*, initiated by the Scottish Government through Learning and Teaching Scotland. They found reasonable grounds for establishing that activities taking children and young people out of school to work in cultural learning environments, such as museums and galleries, improved the students’ creative abilities.

The constructivist awareness of the child’s self-development and self-expression is what in Denmark has most influenced how teachers and teacher education understand arts, culture and aesthetics as active learning tools. Nevertheless, this area still needs systematic study, as in Denmark we do not know enough about the involvement of art and culture in our schools. A good start in this direction was made by Bamford (2006) as part of her global investigation for UNESCO and as part of her specific look at Denmark, requested by the then Minister of Culture (Bamford & Qvortrup 2006). However, these investigations were not taken further by sustained research, even though their findings led – in direct and indirect ways – to the establishment of the Open School initiative. Today, the Open School throws up new demands for in-depth documentation, as teachers, artists and cultural institutions might not feel prepared to enter into partnerships as learning environments. When the art is involved in specific activities with educational objectives, the knowledge that exists throw up a good many questions and dilemmas. Supported recently by empirical evidence (Chemi 2014, Holst 2015), this awareness has been voiced in the theoretical texts that have been most influential within teacher and pedagogical colleges: Austring and Sørensen (2006), and Hohn and Pedersen (2001).

In the Nordic region one direct inspiration for the idea of cultural partnerships is to be found in the Norwegian school’s *Cultural Rucksack*. Borgen and Brandt (2006) and Borgen (2011) have evaluated the Norwegian initiative and have shown that the project was characterised by high administrative complexity – something not found in the Culture Laboratory project.

Moreover, the Norwegian studies were based on quantitative methodologies, having chosen a mapping method based on questionnaire surveys, whereas the present Danish research collected qualitative, narrative and polyphonic data.

Looking at Scandinavian cases is significant for a broader international perspective, as these countries rest on a long-standing pedagogical tradition that values democratic formation and *Bildung*. In the context of the Nordic models of welfare, pedagogical examples that are attentive to sociality, expression and hands-on experiences have flourished. Despite that, arts-integrated programmes and artist-school partnerships are still a challenge. This gap makes the present study perhaps interesting for a larger community of arts-based practitioners, as it can bring empirical descriptions of successes and challenges in these practices.

### **3.5 Methodology**

Based on the above-mentioned national requirements and international trends, the Culture Laboratory research project sought to achieve a sharper focus on and insight into the following research issues:

- What characterises the encounter between children and arts and culture in schools when professional artists are involved?
  - What kinds of activities are offered?
  - What kind of art and expression?
  - Which collaborators?
  - What learning outcomes?
- How are arts and culture integrated into schools?
  - What challenges does this encounter entail in the school's organisation, activity planning and execution?
  - What reflections do teachers make when arts and culture are integrated into schools?
  - What considerations do artists and cultural institutions make when they cooperate with schools?
  - For what purpose are arts and culture involved in schools?
- What does it mean for students' learning and development when schools integrate arts and culture into their activities, according to teachers, artists and cultural institutions?

- What skills are required in the children, in the artists, in the cultural institutions/cultural mediators and in the teachers within partnerships? — and what skills does the encounter develop in the children and in the adults (teachers, artists, cultural mediators)?

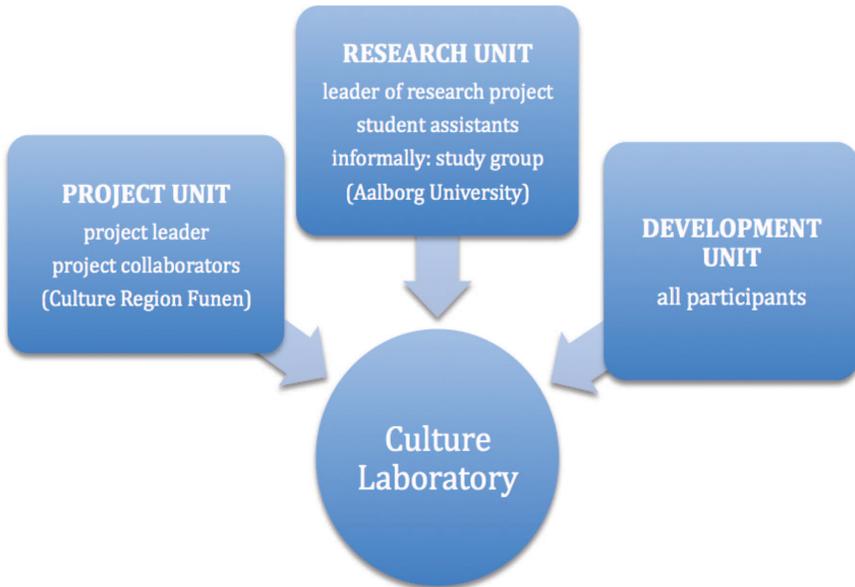
These were the guiding research questions for the project, upon which the empirical study was designed. For research into the subject field, described as artist-school-and-culture partnerships, a dual-track approach was proposed, in which both qualitative collection of knowledge about these partnerships, and collaborative approaches (action research-inspired) were used. Research aimed at hearing all the voices in the encounter (students, school staff and the artists or cultural institutions working with the schools), in order to draw the full picture in this area. In interviews and field observations I was looking at differences and similarities. In other words, throughout the project, the aim was to systematically, thoroughly and scientifically describe the phenomenon of artist-school-and-culture partnerships, to subsequently analyse and interpret the material, thereby highlighting strengths and challenges.

In order to describe the research, methodological considerations and actions, it is important to look at the overall structure of the project. The following units covered the project's work areas:

- project management (facilitation of the specific activities in the subprojects and overall coordination),
- development (design and execution of the subprojects) and
- research (documentation, analysis and reporting).

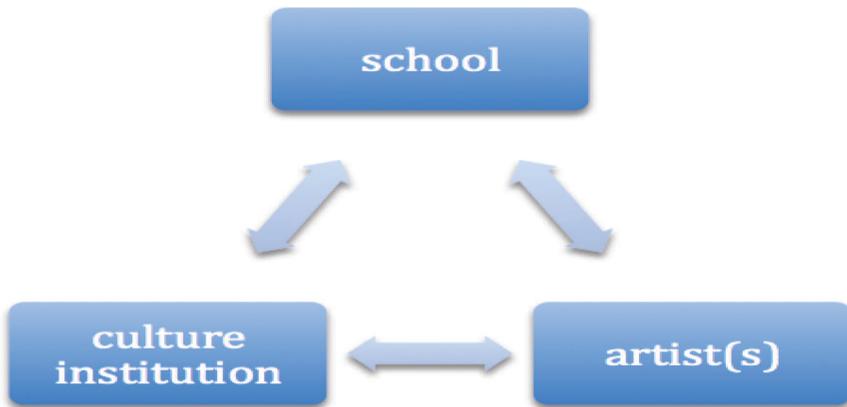
Three independent entities, responsible for each area, maintained a close and on-going dialogue, but remained autonomous in their decisions. This organisation ensured a high level of independence and positive cooperation. The three areas/units can be visualised as Figure 3.1.

The project management unit with project manager Cecilia de Jong was located at the Culture Region Funen. Its role was central to initiating the project, and taking the fundamental responsibility for coordinating the concrete development activities. This coordination included the recruitment of participants, the matching of schools with artists and cultural institutions, the arrangement of several large-scale events (kick-off development-workshop, final conference, and study group), maintenance of informal conversations and knowledge sharing on social media, bridge building between research unit, development unit and Culture Region.



**Figure 3.1** The organisation behind Culture Laboratory.

The research unit was located at Aalborg University, at the Department of Learning and Philosophy, with myself as a research project manager. It was the responsibility of the research unit to design a plan for research (research design), carry out documentation according to the plan (empirical collection) and disseminate the results (final report in Chemi 2017b, present contribution and final conference). The research unit had collaborated with the project unit before the project was granted funding for development and research. This early collaboration was focused on the conceptualisation of the content framework for the project, based on existing research findings and knowledge. This on-going dialogue took place informally but regularly between October 2014 and December 2015. The formal collaboration between the Culture Laboratory, the Culture Region and Aalborg University entered into force on January 1, 2016 and ended on June 30, 2017. The collection of empirical data at the nine selected schools and cultural institutions took place between April 2016 and December 2016. As a researcher, I had full autonomy in my decisions on research design. In other words, I made all the final decisions about what was interesting to investigate and how it would be appropriate to investigate it. The Culture Region's council approved the research design in advance.



**Figure 3.2** The partnership.

The development unit was located at the participating parties: schools, artists and cultural institutions. Each participant took part in the project through a representative: a teacher, an artist, a cultural facilitator or mediator. The schools contributed by usually involving a single class of about 20 students and only in two cases by involving two reciprocally collaborating classes. Cultural institutions in most cases involved the employee who was responsible for teaching, here defined as cultural facilitator or mediator. Each partnership consisted of a trio that can be visualised as in Figure 3.2.

The participants were selected on the basis of a number of different criteria: their will and commitment to the activities, geographical variation across the region, topographic variation (city, village), school size, classroom variation (junior, senior or middle stage), variation of art and genre, institution type (museum of cultural history, local history or art museum, library, symphony orchestra, theatre). In addition, the project unit, on the basis of logistical, contextual and intuitive criteria, sampled the individual participants. It should be emphasised that the logistic criteria did not exclude opportunities for participation in the activities. In some cases, the activities required the class to use transportation to a given cultural institution or site; the project unit covered this expense, when necessary. The composition of the different partnerships became a kind of (happily) arranged marriage: an arranged partnership.

The responsibility of the development unit was to design and carry out the activities that the students should participate in. Because the selection and planning of the activities, according to the project description and the

initial meetings, was to be left to the participants, the project and research units facilitated an initial dialogue between the participants. On April 5, 2016, the project was launched at an all-day seminar consisting of academic presentations on aesthetic learning processes, as well as facilitated and informal conversations between the partners. The facilitated conversations were intended to allow all participants to discuss and negotiate their joint activities. As part of the activities, this meeting created the organisational framework for free conversation to occur in the partnerships. The bottom-up approach empowered and energised the participants, who seemed to be (and later reported that they were) fully ready and motivated to start the artistic and cultural activities.

The arranged partnerships were not revealed before this kick-off meeting and the three participants were given the opportunity to get to know each other and plan an initial outline of activities. As the interviews show, these conversations were fundamental to the further development of subprojects, to the extent that all partnerships reached binding agreements on the content of the subproject. In some cases, the agreements were concluded with specific determination of content and choice of activities. In the interviews, the participants reported that their conversations focused on clarifying the following:

- What are my skills (What can I do? What are my favourite artistic/cultural areas)?
- What are my interests (What do I want? What is my benefit?)
- What are my needs (concrete framework for cooperation)?
- What are my visions for the joint project (what can we do together)?

In addition, a more collaborative conversation was initiated focusing on the following:

- What opportunities can we see in our cooperation so that our different skills and interests can come together?

These open conversations ended with concrete agreements, which were structured differently, but all of which addressed:

- When the participants should continue the conversation
- How they should communicate in future
- Possible dates for subproject activities
- Outline of activities and their content.

In order to fulfil the research objective, qualitative and collaborative methods were chosen as working methods and tools. The research was limited

to primary school children (6–16 years) and to the nine selected artists and cultural institutions that worked with the target group. As mentioned above, partnerships were selected on the basis of qualitative criteria for diversity and representativeness, including, for example, geographical spread (city/village, different regions and regions), age range (different stages), diversity in learning offers (different types of experiences), and the number of teachers/pedagogues and children.

Qualitative data were collected by means of ethnography-inspired classroom observations, semi-structured interviews (students, artists, cultural institutions) that were recorded and transcribed, action research-inspired study groups (recorded and transcribed), and document and artefact analysis.

### 3.6 Findings

The purpose of this research has been to develop both research and practice, as it was aimed at researchers as well as practitioners. The results of this project thus cover both research documentation (development of research criteria and categories to evaluate similar projects) and the development of knowledge for practice (qualification of practice). Although the research and evaluation results cannot be clearly separated, the results of the project can be separated into a research level (research knowledge) and a level of development (practical knowledge).

These findings are placed at the intersection between research-based evaluation (research and theory development) and evaluation-based research (documentation and practice knowledge). First of all, I developed research categories in order to investigate this complex field (artist-school-and-culture partnerships) and the two-fold phenomenon of art and learning. It is always a difficult task to evaluate and document the benefits of interdisciplinary initiatives and complex learning environments. The researcher's work often ends up being a reduction of this complexity by identifying specific research categories and placing the participants' statements within these analytical categories. The following categories of values provide a research basis for formulating qualified interpretations of empirical data and for qualifying the partnerships' practice knowledge. I identified the following categories in relation to the four levels of student, teacher, cultural mediator, and artist:

#### *Student perspective*

Positive emotional response

Learning outcomes

Positive emotions  
Negative emotions  
Otherness  
The specifics of the arts and aesthetics

*Teacher perspective*

Teachers' perception of children's benefits (emotions)  
Learning outcomes (cognition)  
Teachers' own perspective  
Partnership and cooperation with artists

*Cultural mediator perspective*

What worked well  
Learning outcomes for students  
Learning outcomes for cultural institutions  
Educational design  
What is special for cultural institutions

*Artist perspective*

Output for students  
Output for artist  
Educational design  
What worked well  
How artists think

These research categories have assisted in harvesting a number of findings that show what specific learning outputs all the participants experienced. To sum up all of them would go far beyond the scope of the present contribution. Instead, I wish to focus on a specific set of findings, which demonstrate a particular emotional response in the students' experience: emotional arousal. This response is described as surprising, exciting, novel and different, and brings with it a number of learning outputs.

### **3.7 “This Is Really Cool”**

A number of elements are mentioned as positively experienced in the students' interviews. From generic to very specific, these positive responses recurrently emphasise the student's emotional *arousal* in a sudden occurrence that is regarded as new, surprising and exciting.

As Bamford (2006) conceptualised when she drafted the UNESCO report on children’s experiences with artistic and cultural activities, a common feature of these encounters with the arts was the ‘wow’ effect (*the wow factor*), i.e. an unexpected, positive and surprising experiential recognition. The students interviewed in the present study also reported that they were surprised by some activities in their artistic expression as such. For instance, the smoke sculptures exploded by the sea by a conceptual and land-artist provoked great excitement in the schoolchildren. In this case, the activity is just designed to surprise the recipient, who merely participates as spectator. However, the students also reported surprise and excitement resulting from their own works of art, in which they participated as makers. A 2<sup>nd</sup> grade boy explained his positive experience, reporting his amazement about the process and the product of the artistic activity: “I think it was cool because everything went up in smoke there, [the smoke] could have different colours . . . and then the picture we made working together, I think it was really nice.”<sup>2</sup> As Berlyne (1971) conceptualised, *arousal* is a psycho-emotional experience or state that is fundamental to learning, because it brings with it a heightened level of attention, and perhaps also of concentration. Berlyne’s arousal theory recognised a special role for emotions in learning processes. An individual that is aroused by a specific experience is able to perceive alertness and focused attention, a state that may facilitate optimal absorption of learning matter. According to Ellen Winner (1982), arousal from participation in the arts has a double effect, on the one hand, hedonistic, because of the “pleasure given by art’s formal properties” (Winner 1982, p. 64), on the other, cognitive: “Art serves the human need for knowledge [and] functions ultimately to reveal and clarify reality” (Winner 1982, p. 65). Similar arguments are echoed in Vygotsky (1997), where learning is seen as a conscious and qualified response to stimuli, appropriate to a given context. Vygotsky defines this process as the emergence of purposive behaviour and it is central to explaining how emotional arousal can generate learning outputs. If learning is understood as embodied and emotional, then psycho-emotional awakesness would provide fertile ground for any learning process. “The perceptive system, based on sensory and bodily experiences, feeds in different ways the cognitive system, for instance by triggering arousal or interest or engagement. In this way organisms apply analytical skills, initiating processes of decomposition and composition, but also appropriate responses in form of

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<sup>2</sup>From now on, all quotes without reference will refer to the original interviews in this project.

actions” (Chemi 2017a, p. 19). As Lynn Fels (2011) notes, the concept of “wide-awakeness” (p. 340), already present in Maxine Greene’s pedagogical philosophy, is fundamental to artistic (and specifically performative) inquiry.

These experiences seem, by means of surprise, to awaken the students because they are designed to provoke awe in themselves, for instance using sudden explosions, changing colours, displacements of artefacts. They also surprise the students because they are experiences that are new to them. Novelty value is indeed one of the elements that has most positive appeal to children. Sometimes novelty is appreciated for itself, regardless of content. In other words, children might appreciate positively a change in school routine, regardless of what it is about. In this case, the arts have not much to contribute, except their inherent capacity of bringing novelty to the surface or working with continuously new or renewed approaches. When students mention the usefulness of new experiences, they specify that, for them, it is fun to try something either in production (2<sup>nd</sup> grade boy: “We had not tried it before”) or in a new physical environment (3<sup>rd</sup> grade boy: “Fun to see something else”), or just something new in relation to school and school tasks, as a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade boy says: “It has helped a lot that we didn’t just sit and do the same things all the time, but did something new and saw it all from several angles”. A 9<sup>th</sup> grade girl reported a similar experience: “I think it was fun. It was challenging and it was fun trying something different, something that we are not used to [in] everyday life”. Several students emphasised how exciting it was to try new media (8<sup>th</sup> grade boy: “It was exciting, we have been around and learning a lot of new stuff about stop-motion and generally on how to work with animation. Also very funny when we listened”) or maybe other skills (a 9<sup>th</sup> grade girl: “[It was] great fun to focus on something different from what we are just used to in school. It involves a lot of school-subjects, such as mathematics and Danish, [but here] there is also a focus on personal communication”).

Much of the students’ enthusiasm was justified by their impression of the artistic and cultural activities as different, or *other*, from school. The students’ formulations ranged from a generic “change in the school day” (9<sup>th</sup> grade boy) to a more nuanced explanation of how the activities experienced differed from the everyday life of the school: “[It was] quite fun to go somewhere other than school and learn something different from what you can do in school” (2<sup>nd</sup> grade girl), “You don’t have to sit on a chair *aaaaall* the time and you could play a little” (2<sup>nd</sup> grade boy) “So it’s a bit more fun than just sitting on your chair, so it’s a bit more fun when you get out and do something else” (7<sup>th</sup> grade girl). In other words, the students’ arousal seems to emerge

from the fact that the artistic experiences and the approaches used in Culture Laboratory were *new* to them and also *unexpected* in a school context.

### 3.8 Different from School

Whether the students assessed their experience positively or not, they all took a clear position on the extent to which the activities of the Culture Laboratory differed from their everyday life at school. All students were asked explicitly to consider the following:

What is the difference between ordinary art education and these partnerships for you?

What is the difference between the regular school and these activities for you?

The interviews showed a fairly clear awareness that there was actually a difference and which specific elements defined this differentiation. The students' answers on this specific topic can be summed up according to the following categories:

- Different from schools
- Just something new
- Different use of technology
- No time pressure
- Hands-on
- Different from visual art classes in school.

**Different from schools** – The students described their school day as characterised by tasks, routines and repetitions. This was considered less engaging than the activities they experienced in the art and culture project. With a clear tone of criticism, a girl said: “We are used to, like . . . sitting and doing the same thing . . . otherwise, when we are in groups, we are often outside and do something where we can run . . . and we must shout to each other . . . But what we did today, that’s in every way . . . different” (2<sup>nd</sup> grade girl). In other cases students considered the presence of repetition in artistic and cultural activities negative and demotivating (they mention “boredom”), where this student says repetitions belong to school life.

When I asked the girl to explain what she meant by “sitting and doing the same thing” in school versus the repetitions that accompany artistic making, she responded as follows: “In one way we did not do the same because we were many different groups who did something different. And so, there was someone with whom to share”. A surprising point came from a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade

boy who perceived activities as quieter than schoolwork, despite the activities being designed as group work and as active, he said: “I think it was a bit quieter than it normally is”. Other students thought the difference was that the children could walk about a little more and there were not many children other than those they already knew.

**Just something new.** – Most often, the children’s statements were merely indicators of a generic difference, for example, a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade girl said: “[normally] you just have to sit inside a warm room all day. There, we were just outside all day. It was something new. It was really nice to try something new too”. Other times, children wanted an opportunity to learn subjects other than school subjects: “it was fun learning something new, rather than just maths and Danish and such” (2<sup>nd</sup> grade girl); “They are not boring hours, like the ones where we have to write and read and do maths” (3<sup>rd</sup> grade girl). The principle of variation was mentioned by a boy in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade: “It may also seem difficult to sit on it, on the chair, all day long and just keep getting information into our heads. It’s also because we have these Tuesdays [special activity-days] where we go out, for example, and then we relax . . . or do not relax, but like that, we get away from everything, from the sitting still”.

**Different use of technology.** – Another point that differentiated schooldays from the arts projects was the latter’s approach to technology. In the students’ interviews, it was noted and appreciated that a different approach to digital media was cultivated in these artistic activities. This seems to be different perhaps because of a more applied method and because this application is more related to reality. A 2<sup>nd</sup> grade girl said: “we could find out where we could use something from some stories, and then we got some themes for the [performances at the] theatre so we could figure out what it should be”.

**No time pressure.** – Several students mentioned experiencing the overall atmosphere as more relaxed in these projects than at school, and believed that it was due to the lack of time pressure in the projects. A 2<sup>nd</sup> grade girl said: “yes, it’s such a time-out, somehow” and a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade boy reported about the positive repetition of the same school tasks, but throughout a whole day: “we only have this subject . . . here we do only that the whole day”.

**Hands-on.** – An 8<sup>th</sup> grade boy talked about what several students seemed to notice as a difference between school and the artistic and cultural projects:

What you learn here is something that you could also learn in a subject called *history*, but what you learn here is something you do

not learn at school, because it's something completely different. Something quite different from what it is in a school because school, it's more about books and computers. Here, you can learn something while doing something, like an active learning. And it's the same too when you look at trains and read a bit about them. Also that's where we did stop-motion activities ... It's not just looking at something and then pressing a screen and then sitting for almost three hours and then looking ... We also began to [learn how to] make movement, started doing some drawings, making something, putting some figures together, and something like that, and it became a little fun, it became easy to learn ...

According to this quote, the students learned *while* doing something practical, thereby learning to trust that the process unfolds from an immediately meaningless repetition to a process that starts to make sense. The activities are the focus of the projects and are not school assignments. Another version of this statement is the following: “you almost do not learn anything, so ... no homework ... Then you leave it and you have fun too” (3<sup>rd</sup> grade girl). It is interesting to note what the girl says: “you almost do not learn anything” in the projects. This indicates that the students might have a very limited view of what learning is when it takes place at school, e.g. limiting it to homework, tests and tasks.

**Different from visual art classes in school.** – Surprisingly, the children also pointed out that the projects experienced were far from what they encountered in visual arts at school. These statements suggest that the learning outcomes our research was able to document were not solely due to the artistic and cultural activities in themselves, but to a particular design of them. In other words, what ignited the students' engagement might not be the arts, but a specific approach to the arts. According to the students, in school, visual arts education appears to be characterised by boredom and unoriginality, as this exchange among three 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students shows:

Boy 1: We usually only sit and draw ...

Boy 2: ... and draw lines.

Girl: ... and then we sit with this book. We usually spend a minute and then we draw ... We also tried to draw with pencil on paper, so we did not see what we were drawing. We always do that when we start. But otherwise you can decide what you want to do ...

A third grade boy elaborated on this perception by pointing out the possibility of deep immersion in the art project he experienced: “[it is] different, also because you get more into it and you get to know more”. Students seemed to relate positively to the challenges and tests of new artistic media and techniques, and maybe even missed the same opportunity in their normal school-day, as the exchange among these 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students shows:

Boy 1: When we have visual arts with [our teacher], we don’t do so many paintings, so it’s very much like ...drawings where something happens...

Girl: Yes, I thought so too.

Boy 2: It was much more fun to do that with [the artist].

Unfortunately, it does not seem that visual arts education – as the only art form spontaneously mentioned in student interviews – is something that cognitively challenges or emotionally fascinates children. On the contrary, it appears to be negatively assessed in relation to the artistic and cultural activities of Culture Laboratory. In other words, when students compare the “normal” artistic activities in school and their experiences with the arts within Culture Laboratory, the comparison is all to the school subject’s disadvantage. Possibly, this assessment suggests a didactic and pedagogical under-prioritisation of artistic subjects in school. As a 9<sup>th</sup> grade girl candidly says, visual art is a minor activity, done when the more important subjects are covered: “[We did art at school] we once did it when there was nothing else we could do”.

### **3.9 Broader and Future Perspectives**

The broader results of the project can be summarised as follows: the activities in the artistic and cultural partnerships are perceived as positive and engaging by all participants involved, but for various reasons. The children’s positive experience was mainly due to the novelty in their school day, as a breach of school routine and didactic approach. This surprise (*wow factor*) depends essentially on how frequently the students are accustomed to artistic and cultural activities, and therefore on how new and surprising *to them* is the encounter with the arts, and secondly on how many of these activities differ qualitatively and methodologically from the school day. Qualitatively, the artistic activities seem to offer (better) opportunities for social relationships

in playful settings and team/project work, and they are more hands-on and experience-based practices, as well as actively involving the students.

The teachers' positive assessment of the project's activities is mainly due to their observation of the students' benefit and positive experience. The teachers' own experience is closely linked to and dependent on the learning outcomes of the children and the usefulness of the activities in a school context: they are happy when the students seem to learn educational content, gaining acknowledgments and inspiration from the external participants, and when they seem to apply appropriately the knowledge they receive. Teachers are mostly concerned about logistical issues, such as the prevention of accidents, and children's safety, good discipline, and time frames, but also about a few conceptual elements, such as the activities' cross-disciplinary content, the dialectic product/process, and the freedom of participation for children.

The positive assessment of the cultural institutions is mainly due to a logistical agreement within the partnership and the great commitment to the partnership. Participants from these institutions mention well-developed logistics and laid-back negotiations in order to agree on the activities' frames. Last but not least, they mention the high energy sensed in the reciprocal collaboration.

The artists' positive assessment is due to a variety of qualities that span widely around the partnerships. This is not surprising, as artists tend to be sensitive to the observation of qualities and to the attention to multiplicity (Chemi, Jensen & Hersted 2015) in their daily work. The artists here interviewed used several metaphors to express this diversity of forms, such as an "opportunity room" or a "conceptual umbrella" or a place for "possibilities". They also pointed to the content of the partnership as conversation-based, interdisciplinary, narrative, co-creative, and professional.

Even though the artistic and cultural partnerships seem to have generated learning across all participants, this happened with a large diversity of experiences. The participants emphasised and valued very different learning outputs. To specifically develop this point would lead us too far from the main concern of the present contribution. However, these dissimilarities call for further reflection on the projects' influence on the participants' learning and development, especially if these projects are to be repeated in the future. As a matter of fact, as a consequence of this experience, the Funen Culture Region will initiate 36 new partnerships in the school-year August 2017–June 2018. Hopefully, the new partnerships will make use of the lessons learned from the present project and will address the clear benefits as well as the – equally clear-downsides.

All the participants expressed what was particularly perplexing in the projects' activities. Their replies show the need for further development at the practical level of educational and artistic design of the activities, but also the need at theoretical level to further investigate the collective learning that might emerge. At practical level, the challenges mentioned spanned from the need for time to set up and clean up art materials or to cope with the repetitions that were required in the artistic processes, to the understanding of new tasks, of idea generation and problem solving (students), or from the necessary considerations about timing (the activities should not be placed late in the day when the children are tired or should not collide with other seasonal activities, such as Christmas celebrations), to security for the children's physical and psychological well-being – which may also limit authentic artistic experiences (teachers).

Participants from cultural institutions were, on the one hand, concerned about over-doing things (activities that are too ambitious, not concrete enough or lack interactivity) and, on the other, about under-stimulating the students, for instance, allowing inactivity by some students or accepting unprepared teachers. These participants were aware that experiences in and with cultural institutions can be so new for students that they end up provoking anxiety or distracting from learning activities. Paradoxically, in these cases, the arts and culture might reduce or weaken the intended learning outputs. Once again, this topic is far too complex to fully address here, because it is contextual to learning values and practices that do not necessarily match traditionally designed school results. According to artists, what is critical in these partnerships is the careful design of activities that must balance between a professional approach to artistic activities and room for experimentation. In this way, one should aim at avoiding strict 'recipes', without giving in to frames that are too free and improvisational.

All participants were finally asked to formulate specific recommendations for addressing the challenges above. Most surprisingly, even young students could be very detailed in their formulations. What they suggested to hold on to was the positively-felt organisation of activities that allowed for self-determination and self-organisation, together with the wide opportunity for receiving help and support from several parties (from home, teachers, artists, peers).

All participants suggested carefully considering time frames that allowed for sufficient preparation and development of the activities. Several maintained that focus should be on the quality of artistic experiences and ambitious purposes (philosophical or foundational purpose, usability or applicability).

Last but not least, participants indicated that the following conditions were fundamental to the positive results of the activities and strongly suggested further developing them in future partnerships: clarification in advance (as artists mention, it is important to answer to intentionality: “what do we want?”), possibility of sharing materials and knowledge, project benefits should be systematically documented before (project description) and after (evaluation).

In conclusion, I wish to suggest that experiences and knowledge from the Culture Laboratory, or broadly from the Open School partnerships, might contribute to reframing the role of the arts in formal and informal learning environments and point to possible directions for future developmental practices and theoretical investigations.

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