

# Student participation in The cultural rucksack

A study done by Creativity, Culture & Education

By Paul Collard



THE CULTURAL RUCKSACK

ARTS AND  
CULTURE AT  
SCHOOL IN  
NORWAY

*(This foreword will be translated in English later)*

Hvordan opplever elevene møtet med Den kulturelle skolesekken (DKS)?

Juni 2013 la Uni Rokkansenteret og Høgskolen i Bergen fram resultatene fra et 4-årig forskningsprosjekt på DKS. En av anbefalingene fra forskningsrapporten var å se nærmere på hvordan elevene opplever møtet med DKS. Som en direkte oppfølging av denne anbefalingen bestilte sekretariatet for DKS en kvalitativ undersøkelse av hvordan elever på ungdomstrinnet og i videregående skole opplever møtet med kunst og med DKS, tidlig høsten 2013.

Oppdraget ble gitt til Creativity, Culture and Education (CCE). CCE er en engelsk organisasjon som arbeider over hele verden med utvikling, forskning og metodikk som springer ut fra den engelske varianten av DKS – Creative Partnership. Årsakene til at oppdraget ble gitt til CCE var flere:

Gjennom mange år har CCE samarbeidet med forskjellige kommuner og fylkeskommuner i Norge om å utvikle kunst og kulturtilbudene elevene får i skoletiden, sammen med kunstnere, lærere og elever. De kjenner godt til DKS og har drevet aksjonsbasert forskning og utvikling i England og rundt omkring i verden i en årrekke, og de har spisskompetanse på akkurat det vi lurte mest på: Hvordan opplever elever møtet med kunst og kultur i skolehverdagen?

Målet med undersøkelsen var å få innspill fra elever på ungdomstrinnene og i videregående skole om hva DKS kan være for dem. Hvordan kan DKS bli mer relevant for elevene?

Hovedvekten i denne undersøkelsen har vært basert på workshop-aktivitet. Hensikten med det var å gi elevene mulighet til å arbeide med spørsmålene og problemstillingene på en aktiv måte, for å få reflekterte og gjennomarbeidede svar. Det betyr ikke at vi ser for oss en framtid i DKS som utelukkende består av workshop-aktivitet. Her ble det brukt som et verktøy for å få kvalitet i undersøkelsen. Resultatene av undersøkelsen skal, sammen med tidligere forskning, gi oss kunnskap om hvordan vi skal utvikle DKS videre. Den skal også gi oss et grunnlag for å avgjøre hva vi skal forske videre på i ordningen.

Undersøkelsen bekrefter mye av det vi har sett og observert tidligere, men har også flere interessante og overraskende funn, og alle som arbeider med kunst og kultur for barn og unge vil nok oppleve at dette er svært relevant og interessant lesning.

Ikke minst er det tydelig at vi må involvere barn og unge i alle våre prosesser, både før, under og etter. Det er dem dette handler om, og det er avgjørende at de blir hørt og har noe å si for hvordan tilbudet utformes og tilbys.

God fornøyelse!

**Vera Micaelsen**

Faglig leder

Sekretariatet for Den kulturelle skolesekken

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## 1. Background

In the Summer of 2013, the DKS and CCE agreed to develop a project which would explore in depth the views of a small but representative group of young Norwegians about their experiences of culture and the DKS in particular.

It was agreed that the views of young people aged between 13 and 18 would be studied in three different locations in Norway: Trondheim, Lillehammer and Ås. Each group would participate in 5 – 6 workshops, each lasting around 2 ½ hours. In these workshops they would be able to sample a range of cultural activities, some provided by the DKS some not, and to be led through intense reflection sessions so that their response could be analysed in detail. Each group was led through a programme designed by a Norwegian artist, each of whom had some experience in the DKS and had also worked with young people in schools in Norway in the context of a variety of other programmes. The artists that led each group were:

- Marie Othilie Hundevadt (Trondheim)
- Pål Indregard (Lillehammer)
- Svein Erik Martinsen Ånestad (Ås)

In total, 37 young people participated in the workshop programme. The young people were mainly ethnic Norwegian but each group included young people from other ethnic backgrounds. Overall, the girls outnumbered the boys. Each group included young people who were regular participants in cultural activity and others who were not.

The use of focus groups was not intended to produce statistically valid results. It was intended to provide an opportunity to examine young people's views and reactions in depth, to explore beneath the surface of their ideas, and to help the DKS understand in what ways the programme could be developed to better meet the needs of young people in Norway.

The project began with an inception meeting attended by the three artists, Vera Micaelsen (DKS), and Diane Fisher-Naylor and Paul Collard (CCE) on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2013. At this meeting the format, approach and suggested content of the workshops were agreed and the team discussed techniques which would be useful in engaging the young people in the process.

Between November and February, the artists recruited young people in their area, designed and implemented a series of workshops and prepared a summary of their findings. In addition to the workshops with young people, one workshop was held in each area with teachers, some of whom were the cultural co-ordinators for the DKS in their schools. Paul Collard then interviewed each artist and reviewed the material that they had generated.

An interim presentation was given to a group invited by the DKS in Oslo on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2014. Those attending included some members of the 'Expert Group' currently reviewing the DKS, two of the artists involved, some cultural managers operating at the local and regional level within Norway and the DKS team at the Norwegian Arts Council.

Following that presentation, and in the light of the discussion it provoked, this report was prepared by Paul Collard. The more detailed reports submitted by each artist are included in the appendices.

## 2. The opening workshops

Each group began with a workshop which explored the young people's experience of activities which they had attended or participated in at school and which involved professionals coming in from outside the school. The general views of all the young people were fairly consistent.

Positive experiences were described as follows:

- It fulfilled a dream I had
- It was exciting constantly
- I got to participate
- I received positive feedback
- I learned something/ a lot from the experience
- I got to «almost be a scientist»: To wear the coat, and to get a realistic exercise to solve
- I have good memories from it.

The young people were less positive:

- If it was long, with a lone speaker
- If they talked about things that didn't engage me
- If I didn't understand anything
- If they had poor / no contact with the audience
- If it was childish / I was not in the target group
- If it was too old fashioned
- If they had to watch events with the whole school
- If the venue was unsuitable
- If writers talked about books that don't interest me
- If the adults tried to be cool to get in with the kids.

The young people were able to give examples of events they liked across all art forms. But they were also able to point to events in every art form they did not like.

More interestingly, when pressed to give examples of things they liked, these often appeared to contradict what they had said earlier. So, for instance, one group talked about a professor of chemistry who had come and given a lecture, an event they really loved. It was pointed out to them that this appeared to be contrary to their view that they did not like lectures. After

reflection the young people concluded that it was the quality of the presentation, the ability of the presenter to engage with and hold the attention of their audience, that was the determining factor, not the artform or format of presentation. This was later confirmed by those who participated in the teachers workshop. The teachers argued that, in their experience, young people were able to be attracted to and engaged by anything, even the most esoteric forms of contemporary classical music, if the performers had the capacity to engage their audience.

The young people also stressed that their appreciation and enjoyment was strongly affected by the way in which their teachers participated. Where the young people were expected to engage in exercises or activities their teachers did not themselves engage in or appreciate, the young people' enjoyment was severely curtailed. However, where the teachers were active participants it improved the enjoyment but also resulted in a sustained improvement in the relationship with the teachers. Teachers, in their own workshop, also reflected on the importance of active teacher participation and greatly appreciated the improvement in their long term relationships with the pupils that DKS events often resulted in.

One girl said that her finest cultural activities was attending a rehearsal of a play at a professional theatre, rather the performance itself. She was fascinated by the process through which the production was created and felt that she had learnt a huge amount from the experience. This reinforced the message that came through clearly from most of the young people. They are hungry to learn and want to learn from the DKS experiences. Where there was no discernible learning, they were left very unsatisfied.

The young people were also very conscious of the environment in which presentations took place and the extent to which this could undermine the quality of their experience.

### 3. The experience workshops

Each artist planned a programme of workshops which allowed young people to experience a range of cultural experiences. Some of these experiences are already offered through the DKS programme. Some of these experiences were devised and delivered by the artists themselves. Some of these involved artists and creative professionals from outside the DKS programme.

Following each workshop or cultural experience, the artist leading the group utilised a variety of techniques to get the reaction of the young people. So, for instance, Marie Othilie Hundevadt in Trondheim, at the end of every session, and before they talked collectively about their experiences, would arrange the young people to sit looking at the wall so that they couldn't see each other. The young people were all given a red, a yellow and a green card. Marie would ask them questions about their recent experience, and each young person would hold the one of the cards up according to whether they were positive (green), not sure (yellow) or were negative. This would result in a scorecard for the experience which looked like Chart 1 below.

This ensured that the young people gave their personal opinions before they started the group discussion so that we could find out what they thought with a minimum of influence from the others. It also ensured that the workshop or performance was viewed from a number of perspectives. This in itself broadened the young people's ideas about what might be valued in a cultural experience. The artists, between them, deployed a range of different techniques. The workshops, and in particular the discussions which followed, led to a range of insights and conclusions being developed. For instance:

Chart 1

No.	Claim	Disagree	In-between	agree
1	The scheme (opplegg) was exciting		7	3
2	I learned something from the scheme		6	4
3	I understood nothing from the scheme	9	1	
4	I got to partisipate in the scheme		3	7
5	The sceme was old fashioned	5	5	
6	The scheme was to childish	4	6	
7	I received positive feedback from my partisipation during the session			10
8	The sceme was ti grown up (for voksent) for me	9	1	
9	The artist had good contact with me during the svheme		7	3
10	The sceme had a suitable level of understanding for me		5	5
11	The scheme could preferably have been more difficult	7	3	
12	The scheme could have been more easy	6	4	
13	I would have enjoyed the scheme more if I had known more about it beforehand	7	2	1
14	I would like to experience something similar again	1	2	7
15	I liked the scheme		3	7

Pupils often found that workshop activities forced them to do things they felt that they had no talent for, or **pushed them out of their comfort zone**, so that they often felt embarrassed or awkward. However, this did not affect their interest in repeating the experience. This was clear from a drawing workshop where the majority of the participants reported that they felt uncomfortable because they could not draw, but 7 out of 10 of those who participated wanted to do something similar again.

It was also evident in a poetry writing workshop in which various techniques were used to stimulate the young people to create poems. A video recording of the point during the workshop where they had to read out the poems shows the obvious discomfort the young people experienced in doing this. They nonetheless really valued the experience. In fact one of them asked the artist who led this workshop if she would come and be their teacher.

**Workshops do not always deliver what they had advertised.** In one workshop, which is part of the DKS offer, the marketing material promised interactive elements. In the event the young people simply received a lecture. When the workshop leader was asked to explain what had happened to the interactive elements, it was explained that when this was tried it led to ‘near-vandalism’ and so this element was dropped. This led the young people to question whether those offering workshops took seriously their responsibility to young people.

**Young people are very perceptive about workshop design.** They pointed out that in one workshop, while they appreciated the degree of personal attention the artist was willing to provide, the way in which this was delivered meant that the remaining young people were left with nothing to do. It would have been easy to design a workshop in such a way that the young people always had something to do, even when an artist was focussing on a single participant. This suggested that workshop leaders may benefit from training in workshop design to ensure that their workshops were more effective.

While young people are very conscious of the age a programme is targeting, and can identify this with ease, they are more comfortable than we might assume with enjoying programmes beneath their age range – when these are of high quality. However they frown on ‘childish’ work, which is more a reflection on the quality than the age targeting.

**In one workshop, the artists had been contracted on the specific understanding that they would make some changes to their normal performance by incorporating some ideas from the young people.** These ideas would be intended to make the performance more enjoyable and engaging for the young people. These ideas were duly submitted to the artists several days before the performance. The artists, however, made no attempt to incorporate these ideas in the performance. Instead the young people were provided with the normal concert, and a two minute opportunity at the end of the performance to look at the musical instruments. The young people were obviously disappointed and wondered whether the artists would have responded to adult requests in the same way. It led them to consider whether there should be a more explicit requirement for performers in DKS to take on the ideas and needs of young people.

**In one visit to an art gallery, the artist devised a game for the young people to play.** Each young person was asked to look around the gallery and select a painting, drawing or object that they liked. They then had to write a description of the item. Once this had been completed, another young person took the written description and without knowing which object it was, attempted to draw it. The drawing was then given to yet another young person who had to use the drawing to locate the original artwork. The whole exercise took almost two hours to complete and resulted in the young people exploring the art gallery in detail, looking carefully at the artworks. Later the group met with an art historian who talked about the background of the art works they had selected. The group were very engaged, because they were now being told about ‘their’ artworks as they had developed a real sense of ownership of them. Afterwards, the young people said that this was their best experience of visiting an art gallery, and were enthusiastic about doing so again in the future.

This demonstrated how quite simple techniques can be used to engage and interest young people, and that once engaged and interested they are happy to engage with the serious work of looking at and learning about art. It further reinforced the idea that better training for art galleries and museums would enable staff to create more imaginative and interactive ways of engaging young people in the visual arts.

**One aspect that had been fairly consistently criticised by the young people has been the presentation of literature through the DKS programme.** This mainly centres on writers presenting and reading from their work. While the quality of writers and books is consistently high, the ability of writers to engage their young audiences is often weak. In one workshop delivered in this programme however a literary critic from one of the major newspapers led a workshop on literature. The young people thoroughly enjoyed it and their comments included:

- She was interested in our opinion
- It was not too long (in fact it was 2 hours)
- It put my brain in action
- I am changed for life (from an 18 year old)
- I liked the honesty about the fact that she was clear that some books are rubbish
- It has inspired to read books again (grade 10)
- I have never thought about books like this before
- It gave me new ways to think and will be useful for my school subjects.

What is surprising is that a workshop led by a literature critic would have been the last thing any of the young people would have chosen at the start of the programme, but it became one of the most valued and remembered. It highlights that performers in the DKS must have the ability to engage with their audiences, and simply being a good writer is no guarantee that this will be the case.

But it is interesting also to note how important to young people it is to learn from the experience and also to connect it with school. The most interesting comment from one of the young people related to the value of arts education.

We often argue that the arts help develop young people as critical thinkers. One young person however pointed out that while this session certainly did this, it was in sharp contrast to what happens in school. There most books they are given to read they are expected not to criticise, but simply to like. This they argued does not encourage critical thinking.

**Another workshop also demonstrated the potential for DKS workshops to also develop the skills and ideas of teachers.** In this workshop, a screenwriter began the workshop by showing a clip from a film, and then showing the young people the script of that scene in the film so that they could understand how scripts relate to the film you eventually see.

For the next exercise, he gave the young people the opening few pages of a book, and then asked them to work in small groups to write a script for the opening scene of a film of that book. He then showed them the opening scene of an actual professional film based on the book.

This led the young people to engage in an animated conversation about the book based on the different ways in which they had interpreted the book. Finally, he gave each participant a section from a short story, and they each had to write a script for their section. At the end they had the script for a whole short film. The young people thoroughly enjoyed the session. They said:

- None of us had ever seen a real script before
- Giant fun to learn about film
- This I want to learn more
- Interesting and educative
- Fun to use the imagination
- I hope that I can use what I learn.

It is easy to see how this technique can easily be deployed in the classroom to get young people to engage with, analyse and critically reflect on literature. The young people certainly saw the possibilities, and so would any teacher who had participated. It is therefore interesting to consider how the DKS programme can also be used to help teachers develop new, engaging and interactive ways of teaching core subjects.

**In one case, the artist allowed the young people to choose who they wanted to lead a workshop.** The young people were given responsibility for designing the workshop and approaching the people they wanted to lead it. This process turned out to be unsuccessful because the workshop leaders the young people selected were very famous and turned out to be unavailable.

It was pointed out to the young people that perhaps their expectations were unrealistic, in that famous and successful people may not be available at relatively short notice to lead workshops for them. The young people replied by pointing out that given their limited experience they only knew famous and successful people.

They did not have the accumulated knowledge to have an extensive network of potential artists and performers who would be able to deliver the workshops and performances in which they were interested. This provided a fascinating insight into one of the challenges we face in consulting young people. Often when we ask them what they would like to see they say Justin Bieber. But what this research showed is that they are very happy to accept alternatives if the alternatives address their priorities – which are high engagement and intense learning.

**One artist participated in the workshop programme of two groups.** This artist came from an improvisational theatre background and led the young people through a series of intense,

demanding and challenging exercises which both extended and enhanced their understanding of theatre but exposed them to risk and embarrassment. This was easily the most popular of all the workshops. The young people reflected:

- I discovered how my brain works
- A ground course in letting go
- I laughed myself to death
- I found my identity
- A lot to bring to my daily life
- I learnt about making a fool of myself and I liked it.
- This I definitely could do more in school.
- Easy for everyone to be a part of.

The huge popularity of this workshop helped to identify the characteristics of those workshop which most engage young people. This strongly reflects the findings of CCE in other areas, which show that the deepest and most engaging learning takes place in situations where young people are simultaneously physically, socially, emotionally and intellectually engaged.

#### 4. Final reflections

At the end the young people were given the opportunity to offer some final reflections. This enabled them to build on their learning over the whole period of the workshops. A number of key themes emerged:

##### Quality

The young people had clearly come to the view that they would be able to enjoy anything, so long as the quality was high enough.

In coming to this conclusion they were able to clearly articulate a sophisticated understanding of quality, so as to distinguish between input quality, process quality and output quality. In short, they appreciated that the input quality, by which we mean the expertise of the professionals who came to the school and the quality of the resources (money, equipment) which supported that visit were high. However, the process quality, by which we mean the context in which the performances and workshops took place and the ability of the performers and workshop leaders to engage with their audiences, is generally low.

They complain articulately about the impossibility of enjoying a music performance when it is given at 9 am in the morning, in a cold gym in the presence of the whole school with the sarcastic comments of the more disengaged young people clearly audible.

They feel that process quality is also adversely affected by the lack of training of artists in effective workshop design, in the lack of connection between many DKS programmes and the school curriculum, and in the absence of clear learning outcomes. But they also appreciate

that output quality, by which we mean whether individuals feel they have derived value from the experience, is ultimately not controllable by DKS. Complex processes determine whether any individual will appreciate and value a particular experience.

However, they also see that in many cases it is predictable whether certain people will get anything from an experience and they wonder why they should be compelled to participate. It affects the enjoyment of everyone.

In this context, they all really valued the construction of the workshops, in which they were able to work in small groups with young people of different ages. This, they felt, significantly increased the quality of their experience.

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## Learning

We were surprised by the importance that young people placed on the value of learning within DKS programmes. Coming as they do from a generation that is often criticised for being unmotivated by learning, it was fascinating to see how they constantly demanded learning outcomes and a clear connection with the school curriculum.

It is easy to conclude that it shows that the issue in school is not lack of interest in learning, but a problem in perceiving the relevance of much school learning. As making learning more explicit within the DKS programme would be relatively easy to achieve, this suggests that its perceived value to young people would be easy to improve.

The workshops with teachers also revealed some interesting challenges. Teachers wanted the DKS offer to be more closely and connected with the curriculum. However, they felt that they, as professionals, were in a better position to see the connections with the curriculum than DKS artists. But they also felt that they did not have the time to make these connections. This needs to be resolved. This would probably be achieved by having a ‘teacher expert group’ working to connect the DKS offer with the curriculum.

## Atmosphere

A constant theme in the discussions with young people was the attitude towards the DKS being expressed by other teachers in the school. Young people talked about ‘being punished’ for going to DKS events.

What they told us was that when they elect to attend DKS events, teachers of other subjects will give them an increased workload of assignments to be completed outside school to make up for the time they have lost. The view of the young people is that this is out of all proportion to the time actually being lost, and hence their impression of being ‘punished’.

Teachers in the focus group workshops also talked extensively about the hostility towards DKS being shown by teachers outside the programme. It is widely seen as being a ‘time thief’. In reality, DKS takes up very little school time but this negative view of its impact on

*Boy 16: I'm inspired to read books again, which I haven't done in years!*

the school timetable is most often expressed by STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) teachers.

It is true that STEM subjects are struggling to engage and motivate young people. This is a worldwide phenomenon, and the DKS is unlikely to be the explanation. It is more likely that the teaching approach in STEM subjects is the cause, and DKS has the potential to contribute to an improvement in attitudes towards STEM, but only if STEM teachers reduce their levels of hostility and embrace the opportunity DKS offers.

## Gender

One of the most interesting issues raised by the young people during these discussions was around the issue of gender. As they were aware that DKS offers were designed to be targeted to specific groups, they wondered whether there should also be a gender differentiation. Do teenage girls and teenage boys really want to always have the same experiences? Should DKS programmes be differentiated on gender?

## 5. Recommendations

The intelligence and insights that young people showed in engaging with this process suggests that they should have a long term role at all levels in shaping the future of the DKS.

While the young people clearly showed that they could enjoy anything if it was delivered in a way that engaged them, they clearly want more participative and interactive experiences. Learning should be central to the DKS experience and this requires an improved relationship between teachers and the DKS offer.

Those offering DKS programmes would benefit from improved training to ensure that their offerings have the greatest impact.

Young people and teachers believe that teachers must participate fully in DKS offers, but this requires DKS offers to have an improved design.

Quality needs to be at the centre of the DKS but this requires the development of a more rounded view of what quality is. In particular, the quality of the environment and circumstances in which activities take place must be taken into account.

For these new objectives to be achieved the relationship between education and culture at a national level needs to improve.