



Opportunities and challenges of dialogic pedagogy in art museum education



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Abstract

The aim of this interpretative, qualitative research study is to investigate affordances and constraints of dialogic pedagogy in the museums, as well as its broader contribution to society today. The background is my involvement in a Danish development project called 'Museums and Cultural Institutions as Spaces for Citizenship,' initiated by seven art museum educators in Copenhagen and supported by the Ministry of Culture. Denmark has a strong dialogic tradition dating back to Grundtvig's belief in the power of 'the oral word' to foster democratic 'Bildung.' Museum education, on the other hand, has a long tradition of monologic transmission. Still, a more participatory pedagogy has been gaining ground over many years.

This study is based on the observations of three-hour-long teaching sessions in seven museums and has a Bakhtinian framework. While the overall analysis builds on the whole project, two cases are discussed in more detail. The overarching research question is how central aspects of dialogic pedagogy played out in an art museum context and its opportunities and challenges. The subquestions focus on three central Bakhtinian concepts: How did the educators facilitate multivoicedness during the short museum visits? What role did difference and disagreement play? What opportunities emerged for students to develop internally persuasive discourse? I have chosen these concepts because they are central in dialogism and combined them because they are closely connected in Bakhtin's work. The final reflections open a wider perspective of how dialogic museum education may contribute to overarching functions of education: qualification, socialization, and subjectification.

Key findings were that the museum educators' transition from traditional to dialogic pedagogy was enhanced by their genuine interest in hearing students' voices. They succeeded in engaging students in multivoiced dialogues but with a tendency towards harmonization rather than the exploration of diversity and difference. The practical aesthetic workshops offered unique opportunities for students to develop their internally persuasive word, i.e., by replacing authoritative interpretations of artworks with their own. Challenges experienced by the educators were, e.g., the dilemmas between preplanning and student choice and between disseminating their professional art knowledge and facilitating students' meaning making and creativity. In contrast, students found the lack of workshop follow-up problematic.

The article provides deeper insight into museums as an alternative pedagogical arena. Museum educators and non-museum classroom teachers may find it useful for cultivating greater dialogic interactions in respective learning contexts.

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space. Most of her articles in English, published for instance in *Written Communication* and *Studies in Higher Education*, are based on empirical observation studies.



Introduction

The junior high school students who are slowly coming into the entrance hall at the National Gallery of Denmark in Copenhagen (SMK) are already 20 minutes late. "Eight grade students have their own pace," says the teacher. Nana, the museum educator, welcomes the 23 students whom she meets for the first time. She gives them a very short introduction to the impressive building and the plans for their 3-hour visit. The topic for the class visit is "The Danish golden age and national identity," a common topic for school visits in art museums. After 5 minutes, I can hear a girl commenting: "Oh my god, how boring." The next hour she demonstrates her lack of interest by closing her eyes while standing or lying flat on the floor. Four of the boys seem to have their own agenda and are edging away from the class. Others are engaged in small-talk with each other. The students' expectations seem low, except for three girls who show their enthusiasm about being in the museum and continuously ask questions.

Two hours later, after a visit to the exhibitions, discussion, and varied activities, all the students are engaged around computers in the workshop room of the museum in discussions about which of the eight photos their group has taken best symbolizes or illustrates national or personal identity. The girl, who initially demonstrated her boredom, tries to convince her group to choose a picture showing the faces of the group members: "Can't you see that we represent Denmark as it is today: We all look Danish, but three of us have either parents or grandparents who are born in other countries. They came as refugees or job seekers." One of the four boys comments at the end: "This digital photo workshop saved the day for me." (Observation notes)

The vignette above illustrates some of the challenges and opportunities for museum educators. First of all, museum educators meet classes of students they had not seen before and then only spend 1 – 3 hours together. Many students have hardly been to a museum before, and some hide their insecurity by behaving like strangers in a strange land. Others react negatively to the 'force feeding' of art. At first, my curiosity focused on whether disinterest and opposition could be turned around and how the museum educators would deal with this in order to initiate dialogue.

Schoolteachers, who interact with students in a class for months and sometimes several years, have very different relationship building and dialogue conditions than museum educators. It is easy to assume that museum educators are disadvantaged compared to schoolteachers when practicing dialogic pedagogy. However, my analysis shows that the issue is more complex and that museums have other dialogic potentials than schools.

The purpose of this article is to provide deeper insight into museums as an alternative pedagogical arena and to show educators in other contexts the potential of Bakhtin's dialogism. The point of departure for the article is my involvement in a comprehensive Danish development project called *Museums and Cultural Institutions as Spaces for Citizenship* (later referred to as the "Citizenship project"). It lasted from 2009-2014 and comprised seven institutions (later ten) in the Copenhagen area.¹ Phase 1 of the project focused on *teaching in the museums*, phase 2 on *pedagogical training* of the many part-time museum

¹ The initial participants in the Citizenship Project were the National Gallery of Denmark (SMK), Nikolaj Art Center, Thorvaldsen's Museum, Køge Museum for Art in Public Spaces, Design Museum Denmark, J.F. Willumsens Museum and Music in Skoletjenesten. Later three more cultural institutions joined the project: Copenhagen City Museum, the Danish National Theatre and the Copenhagen Opera.

educators, and on how to *curate exhibitions* in new ways that would improve communication and dialogue with visitors, regardless of age.²

I was asked to join the project because of my long-standing interest in Bakhtin, Rommetveit, and other dialogic thinkers and my research on dialogic teaching practices in schools and universities (Dysthe 1995, 1996, 2002, 2006). I was particularly involved in the first phase of the project and contributed to the seminars throughout the whole project period. The participating museum educators had all consciously tried to break with the one-sided, monologic tradition of transmission in museums. Instead, they tried to engage students as participants in conversation and various forms of activities. The project group asked me to observe and then discuss a three-hour teaching sequence at each of the seven museums. This project resulted in the book: *Dialogue-based teaching — the art museum as a learning space*. (Dysthe, Bernhardt & Esbjørn, 2013). The project's purpose was to understand more about how educators could facilitate dialogic pedagogy in diverse ways in art museums, particularly its contribution to citizenship education. The book aimed to share our findings and reflections primarily with museum educators to support the ongoing pedagogical change. This article has a wider audience and aims to provide insight into museums as an alternative pedagogical arena, thus contributing to an understanding of how dialogic pedagogy inspired by Bakhtin may work in practice.

Research questions

My overarching research question in this article is: How did central aspects of dialogic pedagogy play out in an art museum context, and what were the opportunities and challenges? I focus on three of Bakhtin's concepts: 'multivoicedness,' 'difference,' and 'authoritative vs. internally persuasive discourse.' To investigate more specifically how these became manifest in the museum teaching sequences I observed, I formulated the following sub-questions:

- How did the museum educators engage students in multivoiced dialogue, and how did students respond?
- What were the implications of Bakhtin's emphasis on *the difference* in these museum cases, and to what extent did the educators encourage the development of students' diverging views?
- Traditionally, the authoritative discourse has dominated teaching in schools as well as in museums. What opportunities for developing students' *internally persuasive discourse* could be traced, and what conditions seemed necessary?

I have chosen these concepts because they express crucial aspects of dialogism and are particularly important in education today because we live in what has been called a 'post truth world' (Alexander, 2018), where dialogue is rare and divergent voices a threat. In Bakhtin's work, the concepts are closely interrelated, particularly in "*The dialogic imagination*" (1981) and "*Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*" (1984). In my view, they are so closely interwoven that they should not be separated. First of all, they go to the core of learning and 'Bildung'³ in a cultural context, i.e., participation, community, use of

² The Citizenship Project received a lot of attention in Denmark, and several articles and books have been written. My report to the Ministry of Culture formed the basis for a book published in Norwegian and Danish: Dysthe, O., Bernhardt, N. & Esbjørn, L. (2012). *Dialogbasert undervisning. Kunstmuseet som læringsrom*. The book was translated and published in English and Spanish in 2013: *Dialogue-based Teaching. The Art Museum as a Learning Space; Enseñanza basada en el diálogo. El museo de arte como espacio de aprendizaje*.

³ The German word 'Bildung' has no direct equivalent in the English language but refers to educational formation and development. Education is seen as a lifelong process of human development, rather than mere training in gaining certain external knowledge or skills (*Erziehung* and *Ausbildung*). *Bildung* in contrast is seen as a process wherein an individual's spiritual and cultural sensibilities as well as life, personal and social skills are in process of continual expansion and growth. *Bildung* is seen as a way to become freer due to higher self-reflection. (Wikipedia)

language, developing knowledge through multivoiced dialogic interaction. Secondly, coping with difference and divergence cannot be separated from dialogue. It involves, for instance, listening to and developing respect for 'the Other' and his or her divergent views, question one's certainties, and develop a point of view and stand up for it. All of this is part of moving from an authoritative towards an internally persuasive discourse and inherent in the maintenance of democracy in a society. Thirdly, art museums are interesting sites to explore this, as a work of art is always polyphonic and cannot be reduced to one correct interpretation. Nevertheless, people disagree violently over art, whether they visit museums or not. Although there is a danger of jeopardizing the complexity of each of the three concepts by including all of them, I hope to indicate some opportunity spaces of dialogic pedagogy.

In the concluding reflections, I open up perspectives on the wider importance of dialogic museum education by relating my findings to the functions of education in society: qualification, socialisation, and subjectification, as expressed by the educational philosopher Gert Biesta (Biesta, 2009, 2020). He is relevant to my topic because he is concerned with the purpose of education and what it means to exist as a subject in the world through resistance and dialogue (Biesta, 2018).

My own Bakhtinian background

My interest in Bakhtin dates back to my university study of world literature. We read Bakhtin's book, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, as a fundamental contribution to understanding the authoring of novels in general and 'polyphonic' literary artworks in particular. I gradually discovered that in this book, "Bakhtin developed his dialogical thinking, his 'dialogism' most comprehensively" (Børtnes, 1999, p. 21). As a high school teacher for 15 years, verbal interaction in classrooms had always been high on my agenda. Still, Bakhtin's importance for educators became particularly evident to me when I observed a number of high school classes in the San Francisco Bay Area during a year of my Ph.D. spent at Berkeley in 1992 (Dysthe, 1995, 1996). Simultaneously I read Martin Nystand's research studies based on systematic observation of approximately 100 high school classes in the Midwest (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). The contrast between transmission and dialogically based teaching in the classes I observed was striking and resonated with Nystand's findings. As an observer, I realised that the crucial aspect was whether students were given opportunities to talk, agree and disagree and formulate their own understanding in interaction with others, instead of being fed the correct answers and expected to reproduce them. Based on these observations, my first published article got the title: "The multivoiced classroom" (Dysthe, 1996). Bakhtin's theoretical approach resonated with my classroom experiences and has been at the core of my pedagogical thinking ever since. Given the opportunity to observe the pedagogy of museum educators a decade later, I was curious how Bakhtin's ideas played out in such a setting.

What are museums for? Changing conceptions

The starting point of public art museums in the western world was part of a major humanistic 'Bildung' project in the spirit of the Enlightenment (Bernhardt & Esbjørn, 2013, pp. 18-24). Anderson (1991) argues that the historical emergence of museums has been associated with the rise of nationalism and aimed at fostering national identity.

The long tradition in art museums of making cultural heritage and new art forms accessible to visitors is still very much alive today. However, the classical 'Bildung' tradition with authoritative narratives disseminated to visitors, has changed. Current museological research describes a paradigm shift in the concept of the museums: They are becoming learning arenas, where the users are seen as co-producers of knowledge and experiences generated in the museum space. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, an important voice in New Museology, called it a shift from the modern and modernist to the postmodernist museum

(Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). Another influential professor of museology, George Hein, calls the change paradigmatic:

...some writers describe this increased emphasis on education and public service as a “paradigm shift” for museums, arguing that past museums were musty, inward-looking collections of objects, while today they are recognized as educational institutions committed to serving a divergent public (Hein, 2012, p. 178).

This change also means a different role for museum educators, who have a long tradition of delivering talks and lectures to visitors of all ages. They saw themselves and were seen by the visitors as providers, facilitators, and mediators of authoritative knowledge about art. The museum visitors were recipients and consumers of their expertise in the field. Some educators and many adult visitors still prefer this transmission model.

However, participation and dialogue have become the ideal promoted in the strategy documents of many art museums and practiced by experienced educators. This has its background in changing conceptions in art theory as well as in pedagogy. “In a traditional modernist view of art, the work of art is autonomous and self-referential. The artwork has an inherent meaning, an essence, that can be decoded if you have the right tools and the right knowledge” (Bernhard & Esbjørn, 2013, p. 35). In reaction to the idea of autonomous artwork, conceptual artists in the 1960s pointed to art as an idea, thinking device, and process. The viewer is no longer seen as a passive receiver but is supposed to use his or her background and experiences from everyday life to find meaning, often in dialogue with others.

The expansion of the concept of an ‘artwork’ occurs simultaneously with an overall postmodernist discourse. ...When meaning is not conceived as a core of the artwork but as something that arises in a complex network of contexts and relations ...the viewer is not just a passive receiver ... In a teaching situation, for example, meaning arises in the encounter between students, the works of art, the museum, the curator, and the larger social context (Ibid, p. 36).

The expert knowledge of the museum educator is another aspect to be added to this relational web of meaning making. *Dialogic pedagogical teaching practice in art museums can thus be seen as compatible with or even as an expression and expansion of the same tendency.* It is important for students and other visitors to understand that a work of art can be approached in many ways and have different meanings to different people. The next step is to engage visitors to use their own creativity in ‘practical aesthetic learning processes,’ as exemplified in all my seven case studies.⁴

In the Citizenship project, curators have collaborated with educators to find new ways of engaging visitors in active participation in the exhibitions, for instance, by extending the interactive format of information or by encouraging visitors to be creative themselves. In the National Gallery of Denmark, an exhibition of Flower Art through the centuries invited visitors to make drawings of live flowers provided along with materials in the exhibition center.

Art museums are not classrooms, and most museum educators are not teachers by profession, but museums are recognized today as important alternative arenas for teaching and learning (Falk & Dierking, 2012). Museum educators, which is the term they prefer to use instead of teachers, have traditionally had much less status than museum curators who compose the exhibitions. The recognition of educators in the museum has recently risen, and all modern museums now seek highly qualified educators. The term

⁴ The Citizenship Project consists of seven case studies (see Table 1). Only two of these are dealt with in this article.

'museum educator' is used to acknowledge their need to distinguish their role as teachers in museums from teachers in schools.

The museum educators you will meet in this article struggle to combine their role as knowledge providers for a new generation with minimal experience of art and museums, with their own pedagogical ideal of co-construction of meaning through dialogic interaction. Some of the educators in this project were educated as teachers and inspired by constructivism and dialogism during their education. Others came to embrace new education ideals because they corresponded with their learning of new theories of art, as mentioned above. All the educators said they joined the Citizenship project to learn more about how dialogic pedagogy could help them develop as educators. In the application to the Ministry of Culture, the seven museum educators expressed that transmission pedagogy was not compatible with the modern art theory. Instead, they had tried to engage the museum visitors in talk and collaboration, which led to a need for a better understanding of dialogic pedagogy.

The museum educators I met in this project had very high thoughts about the importance of museums in society and the value of school visits. This made me interested in how museum education relates to the functions of education in general. The European philosopher of education, Gert Biesta, has used the three concepts, 'qualification,' 'socialisation' and 'subjectification,' to describe the main functions of education in society (Biesta, 2010, Biesta 2020, Biesta & Lawy, 2006). 'Education' is much wider than what happens in schools. In the concluding discussion of this article, I will define and explain the functions and reflect on how teaching and learning in museums may contribute to these domains of purposes.

Overview of content

Section II in this article, "*Methods and materials,*" provides information about the following issues:

- a) the Citizenship project,
- b) the Danish museum project, which is the context for the empirical cases I present in this article, as well as
- c) the interpretative, ethnographical research methods I used.

Section III, "Two empirical cases: How museum educators practiced dialogic pedagogy," is the central part of the article. It starts with a short introduction to key concepts before describing the two cases, each with long transcripts of conversations between students and museum educators and a running discussion of what is going on. The purpose of the transcripts is to give readers a chance to get on the inside and see for themselves what dialogic interaction among students and museum educators may look like. Particular attention is paid to students' own sense-making as they encounter classical sculptures in the Thorvaldsen Museum and how they develop and express their emerging internally persuasive word.

Section IV, "Presentation and discussion of findings" Here, I return to my research questions and present and discuss the major findings. Instead of a separate theory section, I have chosen to integrate theory with the empirical examples from section III to discuss the concepts more relevant for educators. Particular attention is paid to five Bakhtinian concepts: multivoicedness, heteroglossia, polyphony, difference, and authoritative vs. internally persuasive discourse.

Finally, I reflect on the wider importance of museum education in "Concluding reflections" with a point of departure in the three functions of education as explained by Gert Biesta.

Methods and material

The empirical basis is an interpretive, qualitative study based on observations in seven art museums in the Copenhagen area, all participants in a pedagogical development project. I observed one teaching session in each art museum where children and youth came on field trips accompanied by one or two schoolteachers. Table 1 shows an overview of the seven cases, with students from 9 to 19 years old. The museum educators chose the theme of each teaching session. They planned the content and pedagogical approach, according to the following structure agreed on by all the seven educators who participated in the project: 1) Introductory conversation with the class about the museum and the day's topic. 2) Visit to the art collections or exhibition, including varied activities. 3) A practical aesthetic workshop where students collaborated in small groups to solve a project assignment. Even though only two of these cases are central in the article, I chose to present Table 1 with an overview of all the cases in my project. This gives the reader an idea of the scope of topics and the variety of assignments and age groups. This article focuses on two cases, Nikolaj Art) and Thorvaldsen's Museum, both marked in italics:

Table 1: Sites, data source, participants, project assignment

Name of institution & museum educator	Theme of teaching sequence	Object of study in the museum's exhibitions	Students	Group project Practical-aesthetic assignment
Arken Museum of Modern Art Andreas	"How does architecture affect us?"	The building (Arken)	9-11 yrs. old 21 students	Students' experience Take photos and make a comic strip
J. F. Willumsen Museum Lisbeth	"Self-representation – me, you and the others"	J.F. Willumsen's self portraits	10-11 yrs. old 18 students	Group workshop on Willumsen self-portraits
Køge Museum of Art in Public Spaces (KØS) Kirsten	"Unfinished history"	Bjørn Nørsgaard's studies for Queen Margrethe II's historical tapestries	13-14 yrs. old 23 students	Make a sketch for a tapestry for their own time. Persons, events, objects.
<i>Nikolaj Art Center</i> <i>Hilde</i>	<i>"The staging of power"/ "Deficit of democracy"</i>	<i>Ismar Cirkinagic's installation Bricks of Enlightenment – ML 2090 (Orwell's 1984)</i>	<i>14–16 yrs. old 23 students</i>	<i>a. The Architecture of Power in Denmark and abroad b. Problems of democracy</i>
National Gallery of Denmark (SMK) Nana	"National identity"	Paintings in the Golden Age rooms of Danish paintings	14–15 yrs. old 17 students	A photo that symbolizes national or personal identity
Design Museum Denmark Rikke	"Sustainability"	The Bauhaus section of the permanent Modernist exhibition	18 -19 yrs. old 20 students	Plan the City Hall Square in Copenhagen as a sustainable zone for all age groups
<i>Thorvaldsen's Museum</i> <i>Line & Jane</i>	<i>"New words to Thorvaldsen"</i>	<i>Sculptures of Thorvaldsen chosen by students</i>	<i>18-19 yrs. old 20 students</i>	<i>Make a new label for a self-chosen sculpture and defend your sign</i>

The Citizenship Project was initiated by the seven museum educators themselves, who had successfully applied for funding from the Danish Ministry of Culture. They subsequently invited experts from

different fields to a series of seminars and workshops, with the purpose of improving their own understanding of museum teaching and learning in general and dialogic pedagogy in particular. George Hein, a worldwide respected museum educator and theoretician from the USA, was also among them. I spent considerable time visiting each of the seven sites before the observations took place to familiarize myself with the museums and their different traditions.

My research over the years has been predominantly qualitative, and I had long experience in classroom observation. Qualitative research methods can help discover some universals inductively through concrete cases. "Each instance of a classroom is seen as its own unique system, which nonetheless displays universal properties of teaching. These properties are manifested in the concrete, not in the abstract..." (Erickson, 1986, p. 130). I chose an interpretive, qualitative method for this study because my aim was to come close to what was actually going on when museum educators and students met in the different physical spaces of the museums.

The data collected consisted of either video or audio recordings of all the three-hour teaching sessions in the seven sites. In addition, I took systematic field notes and some pictures. I collected all the data myself, except for one video recordings made by another museum educator who was an observer in that session, and one made by a then present doctoral student. The tape recordings were transcribed by me after each observation and supplemented with my field notes and written reflections. Immediately after the students had left, I met with the museum educator to discuss what had happened and what to think of it. I took short notes of our conversation and supplemented these soon afterward. A questionnaire to the students after their return to their school classes was planned, but only a few students responded. Therefore, the questionnaire could not be used as systematic data. I talked to many students informally during the sessions, which provided spontaneous and useful information, but I could not conduct formal student interviews. It is a limitation of my study that systematic data about the students' reactions is missing.

Data collection and analysis were influenced by Professor Steinar Kvale's ethical standards for qualitative research (1996). Recurrent viewing and listening to the video recordings and audiotapes were a very important part of my analysis. Only selected parts of the comprehensive recorded material were transcribed.

The analytic categories I used were primarily theoretical, for instance, 'multivoicedness' inspired by Bakhtin, his distinction between 'authoritative' and 'internally persuasive discourses, and Nystrand et al.'s 'authentic vs. inauthentic questions,' 'uptake' and 'high evaluation' (1997). More important than the categories themselves was an awareness of the different perspectives behind *analysis* and *evaluation*, -- as well as the possible overlaps because concepts used in the analysis are rarely, if ever, value-free. As Burbules (2000) and Linell (2009) have pointed out, 'dialogue' has, for most people, but not all, positive connotations, while the opposite is the case with 'monologue.' Even if the concepts were neutral, I as a researcher have my own preconception, for instance about what I think are good pedagogical approaches.

The researcher's own values and biases are obviously important in a qualitative study. Dialogic pedagogy was the expressed goal of the museum educators I observed. It was a challenge to distinguish between different notions of dialogue, on the one hand, and on the other, to be aware of how what I saw and my interpretations, were coloured by my own values. One way I tried to clarify these for myself was to reflect on which dialogic thinkers had influenced my own understanding of dialogue and dialogic pedagogy, whom I agreed with and whom I disagreed with. My background as a high school teacher in Norway for 15 years has also colored my views of what is good teaching and my fundamental pedagogical beliefs.

For this article, I have made a new dialogic analysis of extended transcripts from the observations in Nikolaj Art Center and Thorvaldsen's Museum. The decision about what cases and parts of interactions to include was made in light of my research questions. I also wanted to show the challenges of planning and conducting the first version of a workshop (Nikolaj) compared to a workshop that had been repeatedly revised, based on how it worked out for a great number of classes (Thorvaldsen).

Some of the cases in the project served as data for a doctoral dissertation and were analysed from a different theoretical perspective (Sattrup, 2015).⁵ An anthology in Danish about the whole project has been published (Villumsen, Rugaard & Sattrup, (Eds.) 2014).⁶

The ethical issues of the research study were taken care of by the project group. All the involved participants were informed about the project: its purpose and the methods of collecting and handling the data. All gave their consent to participate. No real names of students are used in the publications of the book and articles from the project. The museum educators decided to use their own names. A special procedure was used to ensure informed consent to take and publish pictures for the book, but this is not relevant for this article as no pictures of participants are included.

Empirical cases: Dialogic pedagogy in two art museums

This study is based on sociocultural and dialogical perspectives on knowledge and learning. It is particularly based on the Bakhtin's socio-cultural perspective (Bakhtin, 1986, 1981, 1994). All meaning-making happens through some form of dialogic interaction, arising out the creative differences of contrasting and supplementing voices. Bakhtin claims on the one hand that all communication is basically dialogic, while on the other hand, there are degrees of dialogicality in different contexts. Even within authoritarian regimes, dialogue still takes place, although sometimes underground (Wertsch, 2002). So, also in educational contexts. Dialogue is, according to Bakhtin, both a fact of life and a goal to be pursued.

A short introduction to key concepts

Before entering the museums, a short introduction to some key Bakhtinian concepts is needed to make sense of the presentation and discussion of the empirical cases. They will be elaborated on in the Discussion. Bakhtin often used the concept of **voice**. It is important to note that voice to him comprised the central aspects of the whole person: "A person enters into dialogue as an integral voice. He participates in it not only with his thoughts but with his fate and with his entire individuality" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 293). Many students never raise their voices in the educational setting; they may be too shy, feel they have nothing to say, or nobody shows any interest in hearing what they have to say.

In some cases, the classroom has not been a safe place for the students to voice their opinion. They talked through the authoritative voices of textbooks and teachers instead of their own. Students bring such experiences with them when they visit museums. An important step for the two educators we are about to meet is, therefore, to create conditions that make it safe for all students to speak and be heard and offer them nonverbal ways of expression. My key Bakhtinian concept is '*multivoicedness*.' It is closely linked to '*heteroglossia*' (heterodiscoursia) and '*polyphony*'. The prefixes 'multi' and 'poly' indicate that there are *many* voices and 'hetero' refers to their *differences*. I have chosen to use multivoicedness for both these aspects. According to Bakhtin, words or discourses are '*authoritative*' when fused with the authority and

⁵ A PhD-thesis that used empirical material from the project was published by Lise Sattrup (2015) *Jamen, hvad skal vi kigge efter? - Om at gentænke kunstmuseers demokratiske rolle.* (Rethinking the democratic role of museums. An investigation of how teaching in art museums enables children's citizenship.) She used a performativity concept of both art and democracy (J. Rancier & C. Mouffe).

⁶ The anthology edited by Villumsen, Rugaard & Sattrup (2014) *Rum for medborgerskap (Space for citizenship)*, has a wider perspective on the project, for instance organizational change (G. Hein), cultural citizenship (C. Haas), and competence development of museum educators (J. Bendix & L. Esbjørn).

tradition of institutions or people in powerful positions. In educational settings, this may be the words of the teacher and the textbook if there is little room for doubt or disagreement. In *Discourse in the Novel*, Bakhtin defined 'internally persuasive discourse' as a critical stance to a text, and he talks about experimenting, imagining alternatives, evaluating, and challenging the text (Bakhtin, 1981). This is equally relevant when a work of art is in the center and not a text. Museum educators talking to visitors are often expected to expound authoritative interpretations of a work of art, although they also present alternatives. A person is engaged in internally persuasive discourse when different ideas expressed by diverse voices collide with each other in a dialogue in which these ideas are tested.

The museum sites and the structure of the sessions

I have chosen to present and discuss two of the seven cases included in my research study, so I can go deeper in the analysis, particularly related to the concepts above. The first one is from Nikolaj Contemporary Art Center, where the installation "Bricks of Enlightenment. ML 2090" -- despite its cryptic title, centered around George Orwell's dystopic novel *1984*. The book has raised concerns about democracy and suppression since its publication in 1949. I chose this case for three reasons. Firstly, it demonstrates the potential of visits to art centers for reflection on important contemporary issues. Secondly, it exemplifies a fairly typical introductory dialogue. And thirdly, it shows how even the best-intentioned and dialogically minded educator fails and has to rethink and revise her teaching design.

The second and most extensively documented case is from the venerable, classical Thorvaldsen's Museum, symbolically located close to the Parliament (Christianborg) in the center of Copenhagen. I have chosen "New Words for Thorvaldsen" because this case is a unique example of how a dialogic pedagogy approach, regardless of topic, may provide an opening to the "internally persuasive word" and give students a chance to trust their own interpretation of works of art, instead of just accepting 'the authoritative word'⁷ of tradition or the educators as experts.

The seven museum educators in the project had, as mentioned before, agreed on following the same structure in their sessions: 1) Introduction and an educator-led full-class conversation about the topic of the day. 2) A visit to the exhibitions, including varied activities. 3) A practical aesthetic workshop where the students worked in groups with an assignment related to the topic, ending with a presentation of the students' work, questions, and comments. In conclusion, a short 'consolidation talk' where students were asked to share what they remembered best from the visit, and the teacher and students together formulated some major points of learning from the day. In this article, I pay most attention to 1) and 2) in the Nikolaj case, while the practical aesthetic *workshop* is highlighted in the Thorvaldsen case. All parts of the 3-hour session were planned as unity and closely interconnected. However, the art museum setting affords special opportunities for students to collaborate on projects related to the exhibitions, and a majority of the students in the few evaluation surveys conducted by the schoolteachers afterward mentioned the workshop experience as the most rewarding part of the museum visit. "It made my day," as the boy in the vignette expressed it. A comprehensive presentation of all the seven cases can be found in Dysthe, Bernhard & Esbjørn (2013).

Case #1: "The staging of power" (Nikolaj Art Center)

Nikolaj Contemporary Art Center is a converted church building in the center of Copenhagen, with changing exhibitions but no collections. The installation "Bricks of Enlightenment - ML 2090" by the Danish-Bosnian artist Ismar Cirkinagic was based on George Orwell's dystopic novel *1984*.

⁷ The Russian word «word» (slovo, слово) means «word» or «discourse» depending on its context.

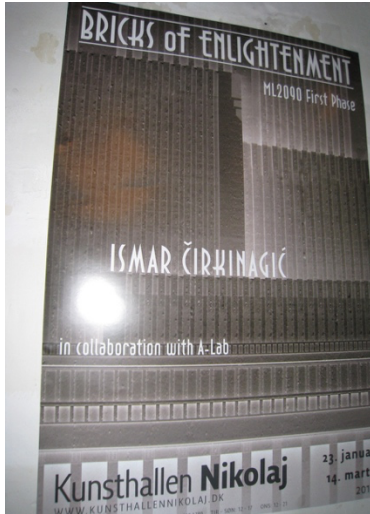


Photo #1: The installation poster (Dysthe)

This novel has had a renewed actuality over the last few years.⁸ I have chosen to cite Jean Seaton's introduction to her article "Why 1984 could be about now" (BBC Culture Stories) in order to show the great potential of artwork to raise awareness of aspects that are highly relevant to citizenship education.

Reading 1984, George Orwell's claustrophobic fable of totalitarianism is still a shock. First comes the start of recognition: we recognise what he describes. Doublethink (holding two contradictory thoughts at the same time), Newspeak, the Thought Police, the Ministry of Love that deals in pain, despair and annihilates any dissident, the Ministry of Peace that wages war, the novel-writing machines that pump out pornography to buy off the masses.

With its disorientating first sentence, the book, "It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen," defines the peculiar characteristics of modern tyranny. Winston Smith, the protagonist, works as a censor in the Ministry of Truth in a constant updating of history to suit present circumstances and shifting alliances. He and his fellow workers are controlled as a mass collective by the all-seeing and all-knowing Big Brother presence. In 1984 television screens watch you, and everyone spies on everyone else. Today, social media collects every gesture, purchase, and comments we make online and feeds an omniscient presence in our lives that can predict our every preference. Modeled on consumer choices, where the user is the commodity that is being marketed, the harvesting of those preferences for political campaigns is now distorting democracy.

But the greatest horror in Orwell's dystopia is the systematic stripping of meaning out of language. The regime aims to eradicate words and the ideas and feelings they embody. Its real enemy is reality. Tyrannies attempt to make understanding the real world impossible: seeking to replace it with phantoms and lies (<http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20180507-why-orwells-1984-could-be-about-now>).

The artist's expressed political intention with the installation was to awaken people to the danger signs for the future of democracy today. Although the topic itself made students reflect on freedom and suppression, the installation itself was not easy to make sense of. The central object in the installation is a model of the infamous combination of the Ministry of War and the Ministry of Love. There are other artifacts but no text from the novel. Hilde, the museum educator, thought that the installation might be rather inaccessible for young people without guidance because it takes for granted that visitors know the gist of the novel and can make sense of the objects in light of their previous knowledge. In advance, she had therefore carefully prepared and sent some written information material to the school. Still, she was informed by the schoolteacher as the class entered the exhibition, that this had not been read or talked about. It is, however, also possible that the installation might provoke visitors to read the novel afterward.

The introduction and the educator-led conversation about the topic

The visiting student group, consisting of 20 girls and three boys from 14-16 in a Visual Art-class, had thus no clue about the content in Orwell's dystopic novel and knew little or nothing about the political development since the fall of the Iron Wall. Hilde's task, as she saw it, was to facilitate an eye-opening

⁸ Orwell's novel 1984 became a bestseller in the US after Trump's election as president.



Photo #2: "The Ministry of War and Love" (Dysthe)

experience that would enable them to discuss the relevance of the installation to their own life world and democratic practice today. What Hilde chose to do, after a few minutes' introductions about Nikolaj Art Center itself, was to send the students on a 10 minutes' walk on their own around the installation and ask them to write for 7 minutes about their impressions. Observing and listening to the students share what they had written, it was obvious to me that their curiosity had been awakened in a majority of the students. They asked the teacher a lot of questions in order to make sense of what they had seen. They had been immediately struck by the suggestive atmosphere in the installation. This made them propose different interpretations. Here is

an excerpt from the conversation between the Hilde and the students:

- Hilde (museum educator): What made an impression on you while you walked around in the installation?
- Student 1: I said in the exhibition that 'freedom is slavery.' And I mean - I don't agree with that.
- Hilde: No. So, it made an impression on you - the reality is turned around in a way? (Hilde revoices student 1)
- Student 1: Yes, turned upside down. (Student 1 reaffirms by revoicing the teacher's words)
- Student 2: I wrote "Indifference."
- Hilde: Indifference – is that your own feeling you're describing? (Uptake and asking for clarification)
- Student 2: Yes, I think when you come in here, you feel sort of indifferent, because it is so big, and yes, ... it was actually...
- Hilde: So, the first feeling that really hit you, it was sort of ...
- Student 2: Emptiness
- Hilde: A feeling of emptiness (Uptake)
- Student 2: and also, the grey and the cold
- Hilde: Yes, ok. What about all you who sit over there. What have you written down? Let us hear from more of you. What about you in the back? (Hilde is trying to involve more students in conversation)
- Student 3: Me? I have also written 'indifference.' It is very big and very, very grey and very empty, which is also part of being both Ministry of War and Ministry of Love. Then you feel indifferent.
- Hilde: OK. And you who nod, does it mean that you agree?
- Student 4: Yes, I have also written 'indifferent and closed.' We talked about these feelings. (Student explains why so many have the same wording)
- Hilde: Try to describe this indifference – is it the same we heard about down here, that you felt empty and rejected, or?
- Student 5: Yes, it is just cold in here, cold and indifferent ...
- Hilde: It seems the three of you have experienced a rather strong atmosphere, which you seem to share with your classmate here. What do you say?
- Student 6: It's a little sort of like ... I've written "Habermas' alienization," that is, all that about the system world taking over the lifeworld and stuff like that.⁹

⁹ Habermas is a German philosopher and sociologist in the tradition of critical theory and pragmatism. His work addresses communicative rationality and the public sphere. He also wrote about power and clientification.

- Hilde: That is an interesting thought – is that a conception that you link to this whole installation or to your experience of the installation?
- Student 6: Yes, to the installation ...that there has to be so much control – and everything has to be so efficient, the whole world, and stuff. For example, in Netto (a grocery store), they've started with no cashiers, so you have to check out things yourself, and yeah, we're gradually all of us treated like clients by the system. It is powerful and has taken over our lifeworld.
- Hilde: Is this something you have discussed a lot in class?
- Student 6: A little.
- Hilde: Have you all read Habermas – I think that is kind of cool?
- Student 7: Have we read what?
- Student 8: Habermas?
- Hilde: Habermas – the philosopher Habermas, because there was a reference to a theory of his. It is kind of hard going to read, I would say. I'm not sure we can elaborate very much on Habermas right now, but I really understand your point because he...
- Student 6: I also think that V for Vendetta was very meaningful.
- Hilde: What do you mean?
- Student 6: V for Vendetta, a movie I started thinking about because there is a V in there.
- Hilde: Yes, of course, I also thought of that,... that would have influenced your associations. Someone else who wants to contribute?
- Student 9: I have also written that it feels grey and cold and boring, but also that there were no windows in the Ministry. This makes you feel that something takes place inside, which is not good.
- Hilde: ok
- Student 9: and which should be hidden away
- Hilde: A secret world or something hidden?
- Student: Yes, there may be terrible things going on, like torture ...
- Hilde: So you get such vague impressions?
- Student 9: Yes.
- Student 6: And also that it was grey. I thought that there is no contrast, that everything is sort of uniform, there is no room for difference and stuff ...layer upon layer, there is always something that controls what's beneath ...
- Hilde: There is always something being repeated one story above?
- Student 6: Yes, there is always something above.
- Hilde: Yes. So the impression of the Ministry of War and Love in the model up there, becomes physical and sensory for you when you walk around. I hear from many of you that here, at least in this part of the exhibition, that you experience something cold and hostile and secret. You say you have the impression of something going on that shouldn't be going on behind the scenes.

This conversation or dialogue is characterized by the educator Hilde's genuine interest in hearing the students' voices and the way they expressed their first, rather vague impressions of an installation. The students could not quite make sense of it, but the atmosphere made them uncomfortable. The conversation relies on students' "writing before talking," a strategy used by all the educators in this project. A few minutes of individual writing seemed to make students reflect and eager to share their thoughts. Often this resulted in more depth of reflection. All the seven museum educators I observed saw writing-before-talking as an important element in eliciting the students' voices, especially those who were reluctant to speak in class. Having something written down on paper makes it easier for them to share. I recognized this situation from my own time in school. I was shy, insecure, and afraid of being seen as stupid in class, and I did not like to speak up unless I had to. And often, I did not know what I thought before I had written.

This conversation is *multivoiced* in the sense that more than half of the students in the class participate. It is dialogic in the sense that the students supplement one another and extend the shared feeling of greyness and discomfort; it is cumulative. But it is not dialogic in the Bakhtinian sense that the student voices are very different, express disagreement, or contradict one another. An important function of this conversation is to establish a culture of oral participation and shared experience: Here is a museum educator who wants to hear *their voices* and who takes an interest in what *they* have to say. I saw variations of this in all seven cases. My interpretation is that this has an important function since the students and the educator have not met one another before. The introductory conversation sets the scene of mutual expectations, and the students experience that their voices are taken seriously.

Does the conversation contribute to the students' understanding of the installation? The educator has given them no clue at all about the installation before asking them to take a walk around, except telling them the theme for their visit, "The staging of power," and showing them the poster in the foyer. Nevertheless, the see-write-talk exercise made it possible for them to establish a common framework of understanding based on their sensory experiences. From the transcript, we understand that the installation had given the students who speak a feeling of the grey atmosphere and made them come close to grasping some of the interpretive keys of a place where something nasty is going on inside the building with such a paradoxical name: Ministry of War and Love.

Hilde asked open questions and used uptake quite consistently (Nystrand et al., 1997). She helped the students articulate their vague intuition, primarily by giving them space to elaborate their thoughts without guiding their interpretation. It is quite common that teachers subtly revoice what students are saying to strengthen the students' own (authoritative) interpretations. But this did not happen here. Neither did Hilde comment nor tell them how she herself had experienced the atmosphere. Instead, she prioritized letting the students' voices be heard.

It is in my view it was rather surprising that Hilde did not follow up on the girl (student 6) who referred to Habermas, as it was spot on to point to his theory of what happens when *the system world takes over the lifeworld of the citizens*. The 1984 scenario was an extreme case of this, and it was impressive of the 14 years old girl to grasp this and make this reference to the philosopher. From the transcript, student 6 seems to understand what she is talking about and does not mention Habermas to show off to the class and the teacher. She even gives a contemporary example from Copenhagen: The grocery store Netto had just started the increasingly common praxis of forcing people to do their own checkout in order to save money on employees to do that job. When I had been shopping in Netto, my reaction had been the same as hers: I felt that the capitalistic profit system was encroaching on my life world, and much more so on the employees' who lost their jobs. We cannot be sure what kind of connection the student sees between Netto and 1984 since the book is not about a capitalistic profit system but a totalitarian utopia prescribed by the state.

Hilde, however, chose to ignore this contribution from student 6 after she posed a question to the class about who had heard of the German philosopher Habermas led to just blank faces. In my view, this was a missed opportunity. She could have asked student 6 to give her classmates a minilecture on Habermas' theory and explain in her own words how she saw a similarity and difference between the system taking over in the novel 1984 and in our contemporary lifeworld. An important aspect of dialogic pedagogy is to draw on students' own knowledge and opinions, and I experienced several instances during my observation period where the class was much more willing to listen attentively to a fellow student than to the museum educator.

We will never know whether this was a missed opportunity to create a link between the message in the installation and students' own lives. In any case, it is an instance of the *constraints* of the teaching situation in a museum compared to a schoolteacher's situation. A class teacher would most likely know her students well enough to judge whether this would have led to a distraction or an enrichment for the rest of the students and a feeling of embarrassment or a feeling of contribution for student 6. A class teacher would also have had a chance to return to Habermas later in the week, while Hilde had just these 3 hours.

Extended visit in the installation and a short workshop

Hilde's next move was to accompany the students into the exhibition and ask them to make a sketch of the War & Love Ministry building. Since this was a Visual Art class, it was a welcome assignment, while I noticed in other classes that strong protests met any assignment that involved drawing: "I cannot draw." Hilde then suggested that she could read aloud from Orwell's novel while they were drawing, and the students thought this was a good idea. Since the model of the Ministry of War and Love was the centerpiece in the installation, she chose first to read a passage where Winston, the protagonist, tells about his impression of the Ministry building. He had only seen it from the outside before he was arrested. The difference is dramatic after he is arrested and sits in a white cell inside the building. Every time he moves, a voice roars at him from a surveillance camera eye on the wall. By reading aloud, Hilde tried to compensate for the students' lack of background knowledge and prepare for another conversation about the relevance of the author's message. The read-aloud made a strong impression on the students, and it confirmed their vague feeling of something secret and evil going on inside the building.

Interestingly, the artist had first planned to make a continuous reading of the novel over the loudspeaker system, part of the installation. Still, instead, he settled on a voice reading monotonously the bare facts about the building itself. As the students finished their drawing, Hilde shared with them what the artist had written in the program about his expressed intention behind the installation: to raise awareness of dangers to democracy in our western world and reflections about the mechanisms of surveillance and suppression today. She did not ask the students what they thought those dangers could be. Up to this point, the students had got a lot of input about ways of oppression and the consequences of the loss of democratic rights and the invasion of "Big Brother," even in their homes, might have for the inhabitants. Unfortunately, the rest of the workshop lost the connection between *1984* and the theme of the installation. How could this happen to a very experienced museum educator?



Photo #3: (Dysthe)

It turned out that Hilde's creative idea about how to involve the students backfired. Through the class teacher, she had asked them to bring an artifact from home symbolizing 'love and power' (associated with the name of the replica of the "Ministry of Love and War). Eight of the students had done so, and they brought a coin, a key chain, a mobile phone, an old bible, etc.

Hilde sat down on the floor with the eight students around her. The rest of the class, however, felt excluded and visibly disengaged after a while, as the eight students shared their personal stories connected to the artifacts that Hilde arranged on a big sheet of paper where she wrote keywords (for instance, 'suppressed,' 'excluded,' 'access').

Student 1 (had brought the coin): It symbolizes something that has power over us; often, money takes over our lives.

Hilde: Who else of you brought a coin? Come here and tell us why.

Student 2: I thought about love, that it can symbolize people who love money. ...And then also, money is power....

Hilde: Yes, power and economy are often tied together. Is there also a connection between money and ideology? ...We have mentioned totalitarian societies, but also democracy. Is it possible to say something about money and the different forms of government we just touched on?

Initially, the students gave examples that could apply to many, and Hilde, as the comment quoted above, shows, tried to make students think of connections to the installation topic, but this was never picked up. The polyphonic interaction, which characterized the first part of the session, became more and more limited. Gradually, the students' private stories totally overshadowed the installation, which was hardly mentioned again. The thematic focus from the first part of the session was lost. The rest of the students showed their lack of interest by focusing on their phones or chatting among themselves. Bad acoustics enhanced the disengagement of the majority of the students in the room, but Hilde blamed herself when we talked about it afterward, especially by letting the eight students wish to explain their artifacts dominate. A series of monologues thus substituted the initial dialogic conversation. A short time was left for the workshop. Nevertheless, instead of consulting with the class, Hilde went ahead with the workshop as planned: Groups of 5-6 got a camera each and was asked to make a 3-minutes film on the theme of Love and power, which they did. The groups seemed to enjoy the practical assignment, but none of the videos produced in the groups had anything to do with the installation.

When we talked after the session, Hilde felt that she had failed, despite the promising start. The students had neither discovered the "red thread of meaning" which she had planned, nor had she succeeded in helping them find their own meaning. She listed several things she could have handled differently: Firstly, she could have planned alternative activities for the students who did not bring artifacts. Secondly, she could have limited the space of irrelevant personal stories. Thirdly, she could have discussed the workshop with the whole class.

Hilde immediately started thinking about how to re-design the plan for the next school visit. Revision of teaching design or activities is not unusual since one difference between the pedagogical context of museum educators and schoolteachers is that in museums, the same sequence is taught over and over again, depending on the number of scheduled school visits. In the big museums, many educators, some employed on short-term contracts, some permanent, use the same teaching design, and improvement or re-design are therefore ongoing.

Hilde's new plan was more traditional than the original one but included student choice of workshop. It retained the initial write-to-talk session. Afterward, the students could choose between the following three topics: 1) "The architecture of power in Denmark and abroad," 2) "Problems of democracy" (based on a recent much-debated scandal about surveillance and control in Denmark). 3) "Aesthetic analysis of the installation." Thus, the interests of different students could be accommodated.

I could not observe how the revised plan worked in practice, as I had returned to Norway by then. According to Hilde, it had worked well. She was particularly pleased that the groups had engaged in heated discussions due to disagreements in the groups. The presentation by each group in plenary confirmed that the students had gained a lot of insight into their respective topics.

Discussion of case 1

“Art is a contested terrain that offers different ways of considering, imagining, and representing our lived situation” (Desai & Chalmers, 2007, p. 7). The installation by the artist Ismar Cirkinagic in the Nikolaj case brings up the question of what the relationship should be between art education and society at large. To what extent should art educators “explore contemporary art practices that may assist and inspire us to engage critically with a variety of pressing issues”? (Ibid, p. 6).¹⁰ Hilde’s intention with the sequence was as expressed in her subject goals: “to give the students an opportunity to understand the background of the installation, to relate it to their own lives, and to prepare a comment that includes their own reality” (Dysthe, Bernhardt & Esbjørn, p.140). Her goal formulation indicates that Hilde’s focus is not so much on the *critical* exploration as on the *personal*. The description and analysis above have shown that she did not succeed. Since there is often more to learn from a failure than from success, I will discuss some reasons that possibly caused the failure of the second part of the session, despite such a promising opening.

Hilde was one of the main drivers behind the Citizenship Project, and she was deeply committed to exploring dialogic pedagogy. As a museum educator, she searched for creative and untraditional ways of engaging students by helping them see the connection to their own lives. Matusov (2009) has called this ‘ontological engagement.’ Preplanning student visits always involves making assumptions about what will work. This time, however, her creative ideas had not worked. Hilde had assumed that “power and love” would engage the students more than “the demise of democracy,” which was the artist’s stated intention with the installation. Instead of continuing in the dialogic atmosphere established in the first conversation, she went ahead with the plan she had made.

In the first session, Hilde encouraged *multivoicedness* in the conversation with the students. She genuinely wanted to hear as many voices as possible, but the fact that she did not take up the challenge from the girl who brought in Habermas may indicate that she was less open to diversity. In the session inside Cirkinagic’s installation, the dialogue was by and large reduced to only the eight students who had brought artifacts. Although their contributions certainly were diverse, they did not develop what Rommetveit called a *temporarily shared social reality* (Rommetveit, 1974). Maybe this was a major reason why the dialogue failed. In the first session, all the students, with different backgrounds and different experiences, temporarily shared the social reality of walking around the installation, and this mediated the dialogic interaction. All the contributions made sense in light of what they had just experienced. In the second session, the eight personal stories about the coin chain, the old bible, or the key did not strike a core of shared reality, and thus they remained private and elicited no response. This is a different explanation than lack of engagement, as it touches on what Rommetveit thought might be a prerequisite for dialogic interaction – at least in some situations.

Was it a mistake from a dialogic point of view that Hilde did not involve the students in choosing what to talk about or the workshop's topic? Did this make the sequence monologic? The question of student choice vs. planning ahead, however, is complex, also in dialogic pedagogy. All the seven cases in this project were carefully planned by the educators, including structure, content, and assignments. The plan (often made by a small group of museum educators in collaboration) was followed to some degree by all the museum educators who taught the same topic for the many school visits. It was viewed as a flexible guide that could be varied according to different student groups and the educator's interest and talents. Particularly for short-time staff, with little pedagogical experience, such a plan was seen as very useful. The

¹⁰ Desai and Chalmers, the authors of the article «Notes for a dialogue on art education in critical times», claim that even though art education has changed from the 19th century, formalist notions of art, that emphasize conformity and obedience, still govern many art projects assigned in schools today. They also claim that art education is based on modernist notions of art, where description and analysis of art objects are foregrounded. This is not my impression of the museum educators I observed, who consistently focused on students’ own meaning making.

Nicolaj case illustrates that students' choice is limited when content and pedagogical design are preplanned. Leaving the choice entirely to the students, on the other hand, was not an option, even for the most experienced educators, given the short time.

Therefore, it may be that a choice between defined alternatives, as in the second version of Hilde's plan, was a good option. This raises an important question about the understanding of 'polyphonic (heteroglossic) opportunities' in education. Does it mean that totally free choice is a prerequisite for students' discourses to have the same right to arise and emerge as the teacher's preplanned one? Or could it be that polyphony within a group, even with the limited choice of topic, in practice gives more opportunities for student voices and discourses to emerge and be heard? Hilde reported that the revised plan led to a dialogue between many divergent voices in each group, particularly when democracy issues in Denmark were the topic. The next case indicates that group workshops afford not only multivoicedness but internally persuasive discourse.

Case # 2: "New words to Thorvaldsen"

The three hours' school visit I observed at the Museum of Denmark's most celebrated artist of classical sculptures had the title "New Words for Thorvaldsen." The focus was on the wording of the short inscriptions on the plinths of the sculptures and the implications of these signs. One of the museum educators, Jane, led the group around in the exhibition, where the students were asked to reflect on the rather neutral inscriptions and what difference would it make if the color or the layout were changed. This high school class consisted of 20 students, 7 boys and 13 girls, from 18-19 years old, accompanied by 2 class teachers.

The initial plans for this teaching session were made during a workshop with artists and tried out on a number of visiting school classes and changed several times before the version I observed. Therefore, this was a thoroughly preplanned session, where the assignments and instructions had been revised repeatedly, in contrast to the Nicolaj case above, where I observed the very first time Hilde tried out her plan.



Photo #4: Thorvaldsen's museum (Ole Haupt)

I was rather sceptical before I started the observation: Was it possible that high school students would be interested in talking about questions like these: Who had written the short inscriptions? What did the signs tell us? What did they not tell us? How did they influence the way we experience a particular work of art? But I underestimated the digital generation's interest in how personal and cultural messages are presented. The first part of the session consisted of lively discussions in front of various sculptures. The discussions focussed on the actual inscriptions and the consequences of changing

the words or the layout. The following example is just a short exchange between a few students and the museum educators as the class first looks at the inscription at the plinth of the sculpture of Jason: "A822 Jason."

Jane (museum educator): "A822 Jason." I'd like to hear what you get to know here and how it affects you when you are visitors and take a look at this sculpture? (a closed + an authentic question) (*Many hands up, students seem eager to answer*)

Student 1: It gives Thorvaldsen the opportunity to express through his art who Jason is, and only through his art. Because the sign does not say anything one way or the other (points to the inscription on

the plinth), but he shows through this (points to the whole sculpture) who Jason is and what he stands for.

Jane: Yes, so you actually say that we do not get much information here - it is only given visually, is that what you mean? (*Uptake, reformulation, asking the student to confirm her interpretation*)

Student 1: Yes.

Line (museum educator): What you say is a very precise observation. (*Praise*)

Jane: Yes. But what *do* we get to know? If you are a visitor who seeks information in the text, what do you get?

Student 2: Only the name of the person and some numbers. I don't know what they refer to.

We see here is that Jane practices uptake. She revoices the answer from student 1 and asks her to confirm her own interpretation. In this way, the museum educator seems to signal that she is genuinely interested in listening to the students' voices and understanding their points of view. What does not show in the transcript is the educators' enthusiasm and how their voices signal positive acceptance of the students. Museum educator Line follows up by praising the student's precise observation. Surprisingly, neither of them uses what Nystrand calls "high evaluation," which means to repeat the utterance and send it back to the rest of the class for discussion: "What do *you* think about this?". This would have highlighted the content of what the student said: "It gives Thorvaldsen the chance to express *through his art* who Jason is and only through his art" (my emphasis). This is actually a very important aspect of how a neutral sign functions: it points back to the artwork itself, the focus of the interpretation in of what the artist has done, and it is left totally to the viewer, while a meaning-bearing sign may narrow the interpretation because it points in a specific direction. Student 1's comment thus went to the very core of how signs function, and it is not just precise, but it points to an important contradiction inherent in formulating signs or labels to works of art. The omission of the museum educators to recognize and follow up is common in teacher-led conversations when they are too focused on their own plan.

During the tour around the museum, the class stopped at several sculptures to discuss the signs, for instance, Thorvaldsen's statue of Christ. The museum educators directed attention to the connection between the sign and the significance of the work of art if the sign's color and layout were changed. This triggered heated discussions, for instance, about whether or not a pink sign written in childish handwriting degraded the sculpture and collided with its religious content and about the sign "Kris" combined with a telephone icon. Most of the students liked the latter, as they thought it signalled a modern Christ open for contact.

The students were very engaged in the discussions about different signs and the effect of the differences. I commented to the two school class teachers on the students' engagement, and they were surprised too because this was not usually an active and communicative class in school. One of them added: "*I think it is because the students feel they are being taken seriously.*" This corresponded with my own observations. Even in conversations when the educators had a clear agenda of their own, students felt that their input was treated as important.

When the whole class walked from one sculpture to the other and discussed the signs, this first session prepared the way for the workshop. The museum educator Jane introduced the workshop saying: "Now it is your turn." The gist of the workshop assignment to the groups was simply: "*Choose one of the sculptures and make a new sign or label for it and then defend it in plenary.*" The choice of sculpture was totally open but limited by agreement among the group members. The oral instruction to the groups was to brainstorm and write down all the ideas they had about the sculpture and the assignment before deciding on their text: What associations do you want your sign to give the viewer? Is it possible to make the visitor think in new directions about these familiar sculptures? The groups got 40 minutes to discuss, decide,

agree, and produce the label on a computer. All the groups had a very intense dialogue about their sculpture, focusing on the artist's intention as well as what it meant to *them*.

One group (here called Group 1) had chosen Thorvaldsen's famous Baptismal Angel, which he made for the Copenhagen Cathedral. The water vessel was formed as a gigantic mussel shell held by the angel. After a long discussion, the group agreed on a quite unexpected and controversial sign: "The Greedy Angel." The other students voiced their reactions and discussed with the educators before the group explained what thoughts and deliberations were behind their choice of label.

What follows is a short excerpt of a long conversation after the group of students had revealed their sign.



Photo #5: "The Greedy Angel" (Line Esbjørn)

Student 1: Now- with the new sign, it reminds me of a beggar's bowl, where money can be put, instead of a baptismal font.

Student 2: I think of greediness and about the seven deadly sins.

Jane: When you say that it reminds you about the seven deadly sins, one of which was greediness, what does the label mean for the way we see the artwork? (open question)

Student 2: I don't know how to explain this, but it seems very strange to talk about greediness as a deadly sin when this is an angel.

Jane: If we continue this line of thinking, ...where does it bring us?

Student 2: I don't know how to explain it, but when they use greediness, which is one of the deadly sins, and about an angel, then it is rather strange.

Student 3: I think it can still be a baptismal angel, but somehow it has become some form of duty or work for the angel to baptize the children. As it has to bring as many as possible to the Christian faith. It has become 'greedy' and wants to baptize as many as possible.

Museum educator (turned to student 2): This is a suggestion continuing your thoughts...

The class teacher (from school): I think about the children who are forced by their parents to beg for money, and who also look like small angel children whom we should help. Then the sculpture becomes a symbol of cheating and fraud.

Line (museum educator): I have always seen this sculpture as beautiful and thought that the baptismal font is a mussel shell (for the water), but suddenly you make me see the artwork in a different manner. Now it seems that the shell is so big that it looks grotesque. It looks abnormally big because you have formulated this new label.

Jane: Suddenly, you start questioning religion itself. The sculpture may get the opposite meanings: instead of religion as offering something, now it is demanding something. There is now an ambivalence between the beautiful angel who gives or asks for something.

The group members who made the label now get their chance to explain to the class how they had first thought about using the word 'zealous' but decided on 'greedy' because this added something fundamentally new and different compared to the old label. They wanted to provoke a new way of seeing the sculpture. Then they had discussed among themselves whether to write "The greedy beggar" or "The greedy angel." They decided on the latter because the word 'greedy' was strong enough to direct the

visitor's thinking towards the angel as a beggar. The classmates praised the group for making such a surprising label, which made the sculpture ambiguous. They agreed that ambiguity in itself makes the artwork more interesting than one where the meaning is obvious. One of the museum educators summed up: "An angel is usually seen as good and fine, but your words on the label bring in a dimension of doubt."

What we witness here is a group of students who rejects the authoritative interpretation of one of the most well-known and beloved of all Thorvaldsen's sculptures, an ikon in church art in Denmark and beyond. They think outside the box and manage to surprise and almost shock the rest of the class and the museum educators, who change the way they understand the sculpture. The group stands up for their own redefinition, which some would find disrespectful and shocking. Interestingly, however, both the fellow students and the museum educators gradually accept their proposal as a creative and thought-provoking solution to the assignment given. Group 1 is not seriously challenged, as is the case with the next group we shall meet.



Photo #6: (Iben Mondrup)

Group 2, who had chosen to look at another famous Thorvaldsen's sculpture known as "Thorvaldsen's self-portrait with the goddess of Hope" (Photo # 6), consists of four seemingly timid girls who look a bit nervous as they present the result of their deliberations around the new sign. They gain confidence, however, as they meet opposition and need to defend their choice: "*The Male Chauvinist Bertel Thorvaldsen Oppresses the Goddess of Hope.*"

The reason for the girls' nervousness was probably their choice of the term "male chauvinist," as this negatively labelled the famous artist and made the sign much stronger than just using the word "oppress." Their new sign not only challenged the authoritative and conventional interpretations but provoked the museum educators and some of their fellow students at the beginning of a lengthy discussion. Several of the more active students in the class supported the group and helped them underpin their argument. In the excerpt from the discussion that follows, it is interesting to see how thoroughly the group of students had studied the sculpture and how they substantiated their proposal for a new sign based on an analysis of the sculpture itself. It is also telling how they defended their interpretation against the museum educators, who are curious but try to argue for the more conventional and authoritative interpretation that Thorvaldsen was actually *supported* by the Goddess of Hope. They gradually accepted the girls' arguments.

Jane (museum educator): I'm thinking a little about your words: 'male chauvinist'— the sign could have just said, "Bertel Thorvaldsen oppresses the Goddess of Hope. But 'male chauvinist'? (*challenging the group with a less provocative proposal*)

Student 2 (group member): It gives him a characterization— that he is a male chauvinist. It is the way he's standing which shows that he oppresses a female figure. It is very strange... (*defending the choice of words and grounding them in the sculpture itself*)

Jane: Yes, but it is sort of funny that a sculpture can be 'male chauvinist.'

Student (not group member): That's also what I was thinking, because, you know, if it was a woman, then I could see it, but this is just a figure... so what about being a male chauvinist? ... It is not a real person (*expresses disagreement with the group*).

- Jane: Maybe we should let the group explain a little because I overheard some of what you were talking about when you discussed the new label.
- Student 2 (group member): Yes, the first thing we thought was that it should be like a newspaper headline, and then that about male chauvinism. It's because we found out that he was never married, he had all sorts of girlfriends, but he would never... he never treated them well or showed respect or wanted to help out at home, -- he hasn't been a good father and like that. And children, he has two children and stuff, so it's more there where this is coming from. And then she is a goddess, so she's also a woman, in some way, so it isn't just a figure. *(vindicating the group's choice of words in the sign)*
- Student 3 (group member): Well, yeah, and there is another sculpture of her too, where she's holding a sort of pomegranate... which stands for -- was it fertility?
- Student 2: and eternal life
- Student 3: and eternal life
- Student 2: and he lost a son
- Student 3: He lost his son at a very young age - the son died very young, so we also thought that was something about why he chose her because she had something to do with eternal life *(the group members continue to defend and explain their choice)*
- Line (museum educator): Yes, so you actually considered many of those family-like relations. Male chauvinism -- it could also easily be a term used in discussions of family and the rationality of the distribution of male and female roles and things like that, so a lot of it comes from there. And then you talked about this (pointing to the label) as a headline in Ekstrabladet or BT (newspapers). Breaking news about Thorvaldsen actually being an oppressor. *(The museum educator refers to the process in the group and how they came to their decision by picking up on negative aspects of Thorvaldsen recently written about in the press)*
- Student 2 (group member): And then there is also the oppression thing -- we have gone in and looked at the other sculpture he has made of her, where she is, in fact, just as big as him. Then he decided, in this one here, that he will be bigger and taller than she is. *(justifies their choice based on studying the sculptures)*
- Line: What would have happened if the work had been different, if she had been bigger than Thorvaldsen, and he might have stood a bit more to the side?
- Student 2 (group member): A little more humble ... yes ...
- Line: So, if he had been more humble in the situation, he would not then have been an oppressor, then he would perhaps have been an ally or a supporter instead?
- Student 4 (non-member of the group): It perhaps also says something about his view of hope, in other words, that hope is, like -- I don't know, like goodness, perhaps, so there is nothing hope-like, since he creates her like that, so fragile (suggests another reason).
- Student 2 (group member): It also comes back to this about how he has lost a son, so he doesn't believe very much in hope and such things, since he has lost his son (counters student 4's interpretation).
- Line: ... you can also say that he is leaning on hope. You can certainly say that Thorvaldsen is being supported by hope. If they had said that, then you would perhaps have read the work completely differently, so you would have thought: Here is a man, where what he's leaning on and what's holding him up is hope. But if he is an oppressor, then it is different if he is pushing her down instead of supporting her. *(testing out different interpretations)*
- [...]
- Student 4: I had a thought about that, what you said about him supporting himself on her instead, but I just want to say that I don't think it looks like he's leaning on her. *(disagrees with the museum educator)*
- Student 1: That's because there is a pole... *(referring to a marble block behind Thorvaldsen.)*

Student 4: No, no, so, I mean, support – it is perhaps more like where – he’s both standing in front of her and pushing her down with his arm and stuff, right? I don’t think it looks like he is supporting himself on her.

Line: Yes, that is absolutely right, as you say about the leg – it is in fact very pronounced, he is not even going like this (*demonstrates the position of the leg*), he’s doing like this (*demonstrates with her arms*)...

Student 3: Yes, you can see that it looks more like something about oppressing or putting yourself forward, at least.

Line: So, if they had written something else, supporter, then it would simply have been ...

Student (not a group member): Yeah, then I would have thought it wasn’t credible, so they had misunderstood it (*The student affirms that the group’s interpretation is actually getting support and that the educators’ earlier suggestion has no foundation when studying the sculpture carefully*)

In the first part of this excerpt, Jane, one of the two museum educators taking part in this session, challenges the group’s use of ‘male chauvinist’ about Thorvaldsen, which she obviously thinks is a bit too provocative. Student 2, who is the main spokesperson for the group, initially gives two reasons for their choice. First, they wanted a label, which would create attention, like a striking newspaper heading. Secondly, the first impression of the sculpture is that the male oppresses the female simply by his position in relation to her. The group, however, has also consulted the information available on the Internet about Thorvaldsen’s life and vindicates their choice by the way he has treated women in real life. In addition, they had compared another sculpture of the Goddess of Hope, where there is a connection to fertility and eternal life. So this group is not just following an immediate idea when they decided on their sign - they made an impressive research effort in a short time in order to ground their interpretation.

In the second part of the conversation, Line, the other museum educator, acknowledges their research into Thorvaldsen’s family relations to legitimate their choice. She nevertheless voices the authoritative interpretation: he is leaning on the Goddess of Hope *for support* - what is holding him up in this time of mourning is hope. It is interesting to see how the spokesperson for the group (student 2) is able to justify their disagreement with this authoritative interpretation. Student 4 says that *hope* is rather fragile for the artist in such a situation. Student 2 picks up on this interpretation but rejects it as incomplete: This could have explained the reduction in the size of the goddess, but not the active oppression of her. The group insists on their new wording of the sign: “The Male Chauvinist Bertel Thorvaldsen Oppresses the Goddess of Hope.” It is a very strong statement, augmented by the use of “male chauvinist.” Line, the museum educator, realises the depth of disagreement in the newly formulated sign: There is something disagreeable about the famous artist pushing down the goddess, which does not go well with the established view of the national hero Thorvaldsen. In the excerpt, student 4 goes far in supporting the argument made by the group for their reformulation of the sign: “he’s both standing in front of her and pushing her down with his arm and stuff, right?” Then even Line is convinced and mirrors the position of Thorvaldsen’s leg. She acknowledges this as additional evidence that the group’s reinterpretation of the statue is well-founded.

This is a rather exceptional example of how a group of students not only made a new, plausible interpretation of an established artwork based on research into the biography of the artist, combined with their own careful study of the sculpture itself but also managed to defend their position and convince the museum educators as well as their classmates. The students showed courage by presenting such a provocative, new inscription, and they relied on each other to keep their ground in the face of opposition. The sign initially met with scepticism on the part of the museum educators and curiosity and genuine interest

in learning together with the students. The group asserted their disagreement and argued well for their reading of the sculpture and the formulation of the new sign.

The attitude of the museum educators can be characterised as open and curious. Although they initially were sceptical and repeated the authoritative view of the sculpture, they were also curious. They showed an interest in finding out what they could about the students' point of view. *They were open to learning from the students.* As I see it, this was crucial for the students in the group, as it made it safe for them to disagree and argue their points. In a school class used to dialogic education, presenting a novel and provocative interpretation would have been quite commonplace. Visiting one of the most prestigious museums in Denmark, however, with museum educators they had never met before, the students dared to show personal courage because Line and Jane had succeeded in creating a truly dialogic atmosphere.

Discussion of the Thorvaldsen case

The presentation and discussion of groups 1 and 2 have shown that they are both *multivoiced* in the Bakhtinian sense that *many* and *different* voices are not just tolerated but encouraged, both by the rest of the class and by the museum educators. This is a precondition for the development of *the internally persuasive word*. It is when students, as well as the educators, listen to distinctly different interpretations of the artwork that their own opinions are challenged. Then they may accept the traditional view or be persuaded by the arguments to reconsider their previous view and reach a more well-founded opinion, which Bakhtin would call 'internally persuasive.'

The "Thorvaldsen case" is, in my view, also an interesting example of how the power of dialogic pedagogy is strong enough to defy the limits of conventional elements of schooling, for instance, the 'assignment regime' and a 'pre-planned curriculum and lessons' (Matusov, 2009; Matusov, Marjanovic-Shane & Gradovski, 2019). The whole sequence "New words for Thorvaldsen" was, as mentioned before, carefully pre-planned, and the assignments were a result of a long process. The idea behind focusing on the signs of the sculptures came from the artist Line Harlen a year earlier. The student workshop had been tried out and revised many times, with a particular view at the formulation of assignments, questions, and the time plan. After trying it out with a lot of different classes, questions that had restricted the students' interest and imagination were exchanged for more open-ended questions. The 'assignment regime' may function negatively in museums and schools if the educators feel compelled to deliver teaching to fill in specific points in the school's curriculum plan. This is not farfetched, as the educators reported that there had been increasing pressure from schools to do just that. However, the Thorvaldsen case *illustrates that creative and open-ended assignments may foster dialogue instead of stifling it*. I was particularly surprised that instead of feeling constrained by the strictly structured time plan, students' creativity seemed to be triggered. This tells me *that there is a big difference between the 'pre-planning' and the 'pre-set curricular endpoints.'* Pre-planning of such short school visits to museums was considered by the museum educators as absolutely necessary.

Formulating goals for each sequence was one of the tasks the museum educators set themselves. *In dialogic pedagogy, however, the ultimate goals are open instead of closed.* The goals Line and Jane had formulated for communication, content, and didactics in this sequence were all essentially *open*: "give students an opportunity to ...", "reflect on how their statements (the labels they made, *my comment*) affect specific works of art," "give students experiences in ...":

Communication goals: "To give students an opportunity to discover the significance of how a message is presented." *Content goals in art:* "To provide students insight into how art is influenced by the way it is communicated and the context in which it is embedded by making their own labels for Thorvaldsen's sculptures

and reflecting on how their statements affect specific works of art. *Didactic goals*: "To give students experience in setting their own agenda for using and conceptualizing the cultural material in museums" (Dysthe, Bernhardt & Esbjørn, 2013, p. 155)

The goals were useful for the museum educators, not because they defined clear endpoints but because they reminded themselves about their overarching goals as they met with students. The short time they had with each class gives a different time frame and chronotope than for schoolteachers, who can return to the discussion later with the same students. Of all the seven cases I observed, the plan for this sequence was the most thoroughly 'rehearsed' and simultaneously it was the case where the students used the space to develop their 'internally persuasive word.'¹¹ Teachers in other contexts may learn from this.

Presentation and discussion of findings: opportunities and challenges for students and educators

The overarching research question of my study is: *How did central aspects of dialogic pedagogy play out in the art museum context, and what were opportunities and challenges?* Some answers have been presented in the previous section, but a more systematic treatment follows. After summarizing the main research findings, I will first discuss some findings from my empirical research, particularly relating to opportunities and challenges for educators and students. Then follows a discussion of the sub-questions from a theoretical perspective, focusing on the concepts of multivoicedness, difference, and internally persuasive discourse. The purpose is to dig deeper into their contribution to practitioners of dialogical pedagogy.

Summary of findings

My study has shown that the museum educators' transition from traditional to dialogic pedagogy was enhanced by their genuine interest in hearing students' voices. They succeeded in engaging students in multivoiced dialogues but with a tendency towards harmonization rather than an exploration of diversity and difference. The practical aesthetic workshops offered unique opportunities for students to develop their internally persuasive word, i.e., by replacing authoritative interpretations of artworks with their own. Both students and educators experienced the short time frame as limiting - the students because of lack of follow-up - the educators because it enhanced their dilemmas between preplanning and student choice, and between disseminating knowledge about art and facilitating students' own meaning making and creativity.

The practice of dialogic pedagogy in museums; opportunities and challenges

All the museum educators made strong efforts to replace traditional *vertical museum pedagogy*, aimed at disseminating knowledge, with a *horizontal* pedagogy, where participation and interaction afforded space for students to create their own understanding and interpretations. The educators created in various ways an open and inviting dialogic atmosphere from the very beginning of the museum visits. Even though they had never met the educators before, students felt that it was safe to speak, that they were listened to and taken seriously. The amount of verbal interaction surprised me because I had expected that dialogue would be easier when the participants had built knowledge and trust over a long time. The fact that the museum educators and students had no preconceived ideas about each other seemed to be an affordance instead of a constraint.

¹¹ This seems to contradict the sceptical view of teacher-made goals and plans in the recent book *Dialogic pedagogy and polyphonic research art* (Matusov et al, 2019).

As could be expected, the museum educators' understanding of what it meant to practice dialogic pedagogy changed as their experience widened. Initially, some thought that dialogic pedagogy simply meant more and better use of questions in order to stimulate student talk. Gradually they discovered that they could *facilitate students' own meaning-making through very different forms of teaching*. Thus, the project confirmed that dialogic pedagogy is not a method to be learned but a fundamental basis for educational practice and orientation to hear the students rather than tell them what to know and think. As a consequence, all instructional genres can, in principle, function dialogically if they open for, instead of shutting down, students' wondering, questioning, exploring, doubting, and objecting. The case studies exemplified, for instance, mini-lectures, teacher-led, and student-led conversations, discussions, writing, practical aesthetic group projects, presentations with follow-up. Some of these have been documented in the excerpts from Nikolai and Thorvaldsen. Many more are presented in the book (Dysthe, Bernhardt, Esbjørn, 2012).

However, some instructional genres led to more multivoiced dialogue and internally persuasive discourse than others, and one of my clear findings was that *the practical aesthetic workshops offered a great variety of expression* for students, not just verballity as is often the only choice. They also afforded more collaboration, more disagreement, and more chances of internally persuasive discourse. The opening vignette of this article indicated that even disengaged students became actively involved in the workshops and contributed both practically and verbally. Some even said, "The workshop saved my day." One interpretation is that *the engagement with the artifacts themselves*, pictures, sculpture, photos, and installation objects, provided what Rommetveit (1974) called 'a temporarily shared social reality for the students. The sharing of an artwork and a task triggered both rational and emotional dialogic interaction, as demonstrated in front of the Baptismal Angel and Thorvaldsen's Goddess of Hope. Another interpretation is that the discursive and the practical aesthetic forms 'interanimate' each other. Bakhtin also mentions that dialogic relationships are possible, for example, among images belonging to different art forms (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 185). "New words to Thorvaldsen" should inspire dialogically minded teachers who work in other areas and subjects to use practical aesthetic workshops, where students need to think together to solve problems, and where divergent views and alternative solutions are welcome. It was the creativity of the museum educators in making practical aesthetic assignments, combined with their trust in their students to follow their own ideas, that facilitated these *opportunities for the students*.

The workshop also led to considerable challenges for the students. The transcripts show that groups in their dialogic interaction went through different phases: a phase for collecting and exchanging ideas, a face of disagreement and conflict about which ideas to build on, and a phase of seeking agreement and collaboration in order to reach a shared solution. This corresponds to findings by the Norwegian creativity researcher Ingunn Ness, who has studied innovative groups and "the polyphonic room of opportunity" (Ness, 2017, Ness, 2020, Ness & Dysthe, 2020). Although I only collected data from a few groups, the students seemed to experience the same opportunities and challenges described by Ness in the different phases.

On a more general level, I found that the students experienced the alternative learning arena of the art museums as positive. It was not only a welcome change from the daily routines of school but an opportunity to show other sides of themselves than in their normal classroom role. The museum opened spaces for other interests and strengths that students might not have been aware of. Some students also seemed to be more willing to accept unusual assignments and challenges from the museum educator than from a schoolteacher. This was noticed by several of the schoolteachers who accompanied their class to the museums and specifically expressed by the two who attended "New worlds to Thorvaldsen," who were surprised by students they thought they knew. *In the art museum, they were expected to use all their senses, listen to different views and use their own judgment and their own creativity*. The students were

exposed to a variety of works of art and steeped in an atmosphere of creativity, seeing the results of artists struggling with how to express themselves and their ideas. In the sequences I observed, this seemed to afford students access to their own subjectivity and creativity, which I see as closely linked. This materialized, particularly in the practical aesthetic workshops. The major challenge both for the students and the educators, was the limited time frame resulting in a lack of possibilities for follow-up, which sometimes led to superficiality instead of depth, both verbally and aesthetically. Interestingly, due to the introduction of the Open School program in 2014, an extended collaboration between museums and schools was facilitated and encouraged.¹²

One of the general dilemmas all the educators expressed was how to balance their wish to *share their professional knowledge of art with giving students opportunities of “setting their own agenda* for using and conceptualizing the cultural material in the museum,” as formulated by Line and Jane in their didactic goals. As discussed in the Introduction, art museums have a long history as public institutions for preserving culture, and “dissemination” is still a key term in museology. The museum educators in my project constantly asked themselves: “What do the students I meet today, need of background knowledge?” - for instance, when a class encounters Circinagic’s installation inspired by Orwell’s *1984*, or the sketches for Queen Margrethe’s tapestries, depicting 1000 years of Danish history in Køge Museum. They chose a middle way between *traditional dissemination of knowledge*, which seriously limited multivoicedness, and leaving it all to the students. Hilde’s solution at Nikolaj was to produce written preparation material, Kirsten at Køge chose minilectures, while Line and Jane’s choice prioritised students’ “setting their own agenda.” At Thorvaldsen, each group discussed and agreed on which sculpture to focus on and took responsibility for finding the background knowledge they needed on the Internet. This, however, raises the question of whether Internet information now assumes an ‘authoritative’ status for students in a Bakhtinian sense.

Discussion of key findings in light of the Bakhtinian concepts

As mentioned in section III, the concept ‘**multivoicedness**,’ as I understand it, also includes the concepts ‘heteroglossia’ and ‘polyphony.’ Bakhtin writes about this concept cluster both in *Discourse of the novel* (1981) and in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s poetics* (1984). The term ‘*heteroglossia*’ is used there about how the languages shape individual voices in different social groups. It signals that when a person talks, their words are expressions of the person’s background, context, personality, view of the world, meanings, and values.¹³ Bakhtin used ‘heteroglossia’ more frequently than ‘multivoicedness.’ Still, I chose early in my research on dialogism to use the latter as my key term because it is more immediately meaningful for teachers and students (Dysthe, 1996). But since ‘multi’ means *many*, they don’t necessarily recognize that the voices also are *different* (‘hetero’). This is also the case with ‘polyphonic,’ often used interchangeably with multivoiced. According to Morson and Emerson, “*polyphony* is one of Bakhtin’s most intriguing and original concepts” (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 231), but he never explicitly defined it, even though what constitutes the polyphonic novel is a central theme in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. Polyphony in the

¹² Denmark adopted a unique “Open Schools” policy in 2014. Schools are now expected to visit and collaborate with institutions and organizations in the community, and thus extended museum - school partnerships are possible. Preparation as well as follow-up of field trips are easier. Individual students and groups can also spend a whole week at the museum working with an artist, or come once a week during several months, just to mention two examples. ‘Open Schools’ includes a variety of institutions, workplaces and organizations in the neighborhood as alternative learning arenas.

¹³ In *Discourse in the novel* (1981) Bakhtin is primarily preoccupied with heteroglossia in Dostoevsky’s work, but it has implications for verbal interactions in general. In Bakhtin’s own words: The language spoken by an individual is not an abstract system,” but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world. All words have the “taste” of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and the hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293).

“... all languages of heteroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them and making each unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values. As such they all may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically” (Ibid, p. 291-292).

context of the novel is primarily about the author's position in the text (Ibid, p 232).¹⁴ For most people, polyphony is a term associated with the world of music, used about a piece where there are many voices, but none is dominant. *Thus, polyphony designates, as multivoicedness, both the many and different voices that exist in a group and the idea of no one being silenced and no one allowed to dominate.* Both multivoicedness and polyphony presuppose a dialogic sense of truth ('pravda' in Russian), in opposition to a monologic conception of truth ('istina' in Russian), representing an idea of truth as the only one possible.

In the context of artwork, whether verbal (books) or visual (as in the art museums), this makes sense, as there is obviously no true meaning or interpretation of a work of art. However, this is not the same as relativism, which gives equal value to all interpretations and excludes all argumentation (Morson and Emerson, 1990, p. 233), whether or not they are anchored in the artwork itself. In the Thorvaldsen case, this was one of the lessons the students learned, as the Goddess of Hope group grounded their interpretation in a thorough analysis of the sculpture. When voices are juxtaposed, each with its own world view, meanings, and values, they may either *supplement* or *contradict* one another and thus make dialogue between them possible. *Support* is important for the speaker, but *resistance* is even more valuable, according to Bakhtin, because it triggers new thoughts. We saw in the Thorvaldsen case that the support and agreement the girls had experienced in the small group gave them the strength to meet the resistance after presenting their controversial sign. The same case also illustrates how resistance has the effect of opening up new perspectives and ideas, both for educators and students.

Together heteroglossia and polyphony embrace *both diversity (hetero) and quantity (poly)*. In pedagogical practice, students are encouraged to voice their own opinions and viewpoints, listen to others, agree or disagree, show respect for other voices, deal with disagreements, and utilize difference as a resource. *An important finding in my study was, however, as noted in the abstract, that the museum educators were very good at the quantitative aspect. They succeeded in getting many students involved in dialogue both in plenary and among themselves in groups, but they rarely dealt with disagreement, difference, and divergence.* I will therefore discuss why this is a crucial aspect of dialogic pedagogy.

Difference and controversy in the case studies

The importance Bakhtin placed on difference and disagreement was one of the insights which differentiated him from the row of dialogue philosophers before him. According to Holquist, *it is the "mutuality of differences" that makes dialogue Bakhtin's master concept* (Holquist, 1990, p. 4). Thus, the simultaneity of diverse voices and the struggle between them is crucial in Bakhtin's dialogism.¹⁵ A central aspect of dialogic teaching is that the educators provide opportunities and encouragement for students to *engage* with the 'voices' of others, with their *diverse* perceptions, experiences, and knowledge. Difference and disagreement may trigger dialogue and reflection, but also conflict and frustration, as seen in my cases. The educator plays an important role in training students on how to handle this.

Multivoicedness, polyphony, difference, and dialogic interaction of voices based on mutual interest in each other and each other's ideas, resonated well with the art museum educators, maybe because art today is a field that thrives on disagreement, challenges, and constant seeking of alternative interpretations. *Artworks are, in their essence, multivoiced and defy set answers to what they mean. Even so, the museum educators were more successful in making sure that multiple voices were expressed than in helping*

¹⁴ "Bakhtin lays out his theory of polyphony in the seminal essay Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics (1929/1973). In his reading, polyphony evokes the particular capacity of the novel to *accommodate contradictory positions and multiple discourses without imposing any central authoritative view.* Whereas a "monophonic" text affirms the point of view of its author, polyphonic writing embraces dissonance and moral ambiguity" (Lachman, 1988), p. 29) (my italics).

¹⁵ This has been strongly emphasised in the "School of the Dialogue of Cultures". See Bibler (2009): The foundations of the School of the Dialogue of Cultures program. *Journal of Russian & East European Psychology*, 47(1), pp. 34–60, doi: 10.2753/RPO1061-0405470102.

students see how the diversity of voices could extend and enrich their understanding. Disagreement was rarely encouraged, even though this obviously is an important way of challenging students' assumptions and encourage independent, critical, and creative thinking.

I interpreted the educators' failure to deal with diverse views as a tendency towards *harmonization*, which I have often observed in my classroom research in schools. But when differences were not raised, clarified, tested, or made a topic of discussion, the result was missed learning opportunities. When I discussed this with the museum educators, they agreed but saw it as *conflict avoidance* and a consequence of the *limited time frame* of museum visits. They underlined that dealing with differences and disagreement takes time. But they also explained their reluctance to flag their own opinions with a *fear of silencing their students* with their own 'authoritative discourse.' I will argue that they thus deprived the students of valuable input. Besides, *authoritative voices also need to be listened to as one of many voices. Students need to learn how to deal with them: agree, doubt, question, and oppose them if necessary.* In the Thorvaldsen case, however, when students defended their alternative signs in opposition to the authoritative interpretation of the sculpture, this was crucial in *developing their inner persuasive discourse.*

As mentioned before, Bakhtin underlined the importance of *juxtaposing* the voices to one another in order to see how they "mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and may be interrelated dialogically" (Bakhtin, 1994, p 292). In the initial conversation in the Nikolai case, most of the students' observations in the installation supplemented and supported each other. The Thorvaldsen case provides *examples of the creative power of difference, contradiction and even provocation.* By challenging the authoritative interpretations of Thorvaldsen's art works and trusting their own, they strengthened their inner persuasive word. It is worthwhile noticing, however, that when the student groups discussed new signs for the Baptismal Angel and the Goddess of Hope, they did not just throw out an idea or an opinion, but they underpinned their opinion by looking at the sculpture *in a new way*, which turned the conventional way of seeing and interpreting the sculpture upside down. And once they discovered this new way of seeing, -- this innovative look, they went to great lengths to ground their discovery in a close analysis of the sculpture itself. In the process of countering opposition from museum educators and some of their fellow students, their interpretation became more and more their own. The students' words carried no external authority, but still fellow students as well as the educators were convinced, and learnt something new.

Opportunities and conditions for developing internally persuasive discourse

The *opposition between authoritative and internally persuasive discourse* was very real in Bakhtin's own life under Stalin, where the cost of disregarding the authoritative word was massive. "The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it." (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342). It is difficult to escape from the power of the authority that was already acknowledged in the past: "It is indissolubly fused with its authority – with political power, an institution, a person – and it stands and falls together with that authority" (Ibid., p. 343).

Internally persuasive discourse, on the other hand, is tightly interwoven with our own word. "the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else's. Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words from within, ..." (Ibid, p. 345). There is a long distance both in time and degree between what Bakhtin experienced and the students in a museum or in school today. But whatever the political situation in the society where young people grow up, they need to learn from an early age to seek out *different* views, develop their own points of view and stand up for them. What is new and worrying today, is that the Internet seems to function as the authoritative word, in echo chambers with no opposing voices.

The experiences students had in the Thorvaldsen case may have had at least two important implications for the individual, the small groups and the class as a whole, even though I don't have evidence to underpin this claim. Firstly, it seemed to build the students' self-confidence, and thus strengthen their ability in the future to assert their own ideas and judgements, even in the face of opposition. Secondly, it provided them with an example of *the viability of challenging authoritative truths*. This 'revolt' against the authoritative word may seem inconspicuous and inconsequential, but in my view, *it shows the potential museums have to foster the internally persuasive word, critical thinking and creativity, and thus also contribute to the development of democratic citizens. People who think independently and dare to challenge authorities, whether orally or in art, are important for a democratic society.* If we look around the world today, this seems to be more important than ever.

Gary Morson (2004) has addressed the problem of Bakhtin's use of the term 'authoritative', which is basically a positive word, and suggested the distinction between **three types of discourses**: 'Authoritarian' based on power, tradition and/or ignorance, 'authoritative' based on trust and respect and 'internally persuasive discourse' without authority, but based on dialogic questioning, testing, and evaluation of statements (Matusov, 2004, p. 15). The ideal of the museum educators, according to my findings, was to be authoritative based on trust and respect, but leave plenty of space for the internally persuasive word. As mentioned before, they succeeded in building trust and respect even in such short time, but their authoritative position as representatives of a public institution, may in some cases have limited the space for developing students' internally persuasive discourse.

Educators in all arenas need to be aware of the authority they carry as experts and/or as representatives of an institution and the danger of silencing student voices. But the way to foster students' internally persuasive discourse is not to tone down their role as professionals but to actively encourage and contribute to the dialogic testing of ideas.

In Denmark there is strong dialogic tradition, dating back to N.F. S. Grundtvig (1783-1872). The Danish professor of education, Per Fibæk Laursen, underlined in his recent book *Dialog* (2017) the importance of two traditions of dialogue in Danish pedagogy, one from Grundtvig and more recently from Mikhail Bakhtin. Grundtvig emphasized the power of the *oral word* through his immensely influential work as a preacher, writer, and founder of the "folk high schools," where democratic "Bildung" through dialogue was at the core, and exams were banned because they encouraged the reproduction of the authoritative word instead of focusing on students' developing their ability to think for themselves. An exploration of the dialogic potential in field trips to art museums is therefore very much in line with this tradition, even though my educators' conception of dialogue was primarily inspired by Bakhtin. My concluding reflection on the role of museum education is a follow-up of this historic link and an attempt to widen the perspective.

Concluding reflections: Dialogic museum education contributes to qualification, socialization, and subjectification

The educational philosopher Gert Biesta has, over the years, been concerned with questions relating to the purpose and functions of education, and I have chosen to use his definition of the three functions (domains) of education as my point of departure (Biesta, 2009, 2020). The **qualification function** is, according to Biesta, about education's contribution to the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will either qualify the students to *do* something, specifically in the manner of a profession or be applied in a more general sense throughout the course of a lifetime. The qualification function has always provided an important justification for schooling. Over the last decades, Denmark, like the rest of the western world, has been heavily influenced by neo-liberal ideas and the marketization of education. This has limited the broad understanding of what is needed to qualify the next generation for life and work. When the acquisition of testable knowledge becomes the main focus, other domains of human experience, for instance, the

creative arts, become marginalized. In his essay “What if? Art education beyond expression and creativity” (2018), Biesta expresses worry about the increasing instrumental motivation for art in education and what our children and young people lose if art is left out.

Socialization is about becoming part of existing socio-cultural, political, and moral orders and is always going on in education. Knowledge is never value-free, and cultures, traditions, and practices influence how young people learn, think, feel, and act.

Schools partly engage in socialization deliberately, for example, in the form of values education, character education, citizenship education, or in relation to professional socialization. Socialization also happens in less visible ways, as has been made clear in the literature on both the hidden curriculum and the role of education in the reproduction of social inequality (Biesta, 2009, p. 355).

Socialization takes place *directly* through the contents of a teaching program and *indirectly* through the pedagogical values and methods of teaching and learning that are validated by the learning community. As I see it, dialogic education is a vitally important aspect of socializing children and young people to critical and respectful dialogue.

The third function, ‘**subjectification**,’ is about how the individual develops his or her own unique character. This has been called ‘individualisation,’ but Biesta prefers to call it ‘*subjectification*’ because it refers to the need all human beings have to be a subject in their own lives. The term constitutes a counterweight to socialisation because it is about how the individual student is given the opportunity to develop as a unique, distinctive, independent, and responsible human being, e.g., moving from authoritative to internally persuasive discourse.

Educators, policymakers, and scholars have found Biesta’s distinction between the three domains of purposes of education useful, but there has been an ongoing discussion about the nature of each of them, in particular, ‘subjectification.’ Since this third domain has been difficult to grasp, Biesta returned to the topic in 2020, from a philosophical, not a didactic point of view. Here he states that *freedom* is at the very heart of education as subjectification, but it is about “qualified” freedom, which means that “it is integrally connected to our existence as a subject. *This is never an existence just with and for ourselves, but always an existence in and with the world*” (Biesta, 2020, p. 4, my italics). Biesta has earlier pointed to a connection with the philosopher Levinas’ ‘ethics of subjectivity’ and his emphasis on the individual’s responsibility for ‘the other’ in order to describe what is fundamental about human subjectivity (Biesta, 2009).

Gert Biesta’s distinction among the three ‘domains of purpose’ resonated with the museum educators’ understanding. They had a strong awareness of how dialogic pedagogy contributed to socialization and subjectification, maybe due to the long ‘Bildung’ tradition in museums, a view of education as a lifelong process of human development (see endnote 4). My findings indicate that the three domains of purpose were closely interconnected.

According to Falk & Dierking (2012) in their book “*The museum experience revisited*,” museums have increasingly become learning arenas for both adults and children:

All museums now place an emphasis on education that they never did in the past. They see themselves as “centers of public learning” (p.11). “Museums differ in one important way from all other learning settings. Museums are collections of things, some intrinsically valuable, others not. Objects, stuff, are the essence of a

museum.” (...) Uniquely suited to capitalize on the capacity of humans to learn initially by assimilating concrete information” (p. 111).

This quotation highlights one aspect of *the qualification function*: ‘concrete information’ and “conceptual understanding” as well as “provide the scaffolding visitors need to grasp the more challenging ideas” (Ibid. p. 113). In the Nikolaj case, Hilde tried to provide such scaffolding when she wrote a pamphlet of informative background material for the classes who visited Circinagic’s installation and when she read aloud for the students from Orwell’s novel. Some exhibitions needed more scaffolding than others, for instance, the preliminary sketches for Queen Margrethe II’s tapestries, which depict 1000 years of Danish history (see Table 1). Kirsten, the museum educator at KØS (Køge Museum for Art in Public Places), formulated a complex learning goal for her visiting students: “Enhance awareness of history, knowledge of the past, understanding of the present and expectations for the future.” (Dysthe, Bernhardt & Esbjørn, 2013, p.114). This goal includes both *qualification and socialization*. Short field trips to museums obviously do not amount to the qualification of students in any formal sense. However, museums contribute by expanding the fields of knowledge typically taught in school. The workshop at KØS, where students were asked to design a tapestry that told the story of their own age, is one example of this. The empirical cases thus illustrate that qualification, socialization, and subjectification depend on *what* is being taught (content) and *how* (pedagogy) it is being taught.

The socialization function, and particularly democratic citizenship education, was foregrounded in the project, not surprising as the title was *Museums and Institutions as Spaces for Citizenship*. Some of the exhibitions explicitly invited a discussion of democracy and issues of freedom versus oppression, e.g., the Nikolaj case. However, as I see it, students learned even more *implicitly* about democratic citizenship, regardless of topic, by *experiencing* dialogic co-creation of meaning and dealing with diversity and difference. When students could say after a museum visit: “My voice was heard, and I felt it was taken seriously,” they hopefully also learned that ‘The voices of others are just as important and I need to respect them, even if I disagree.’ This is one small instance of socialization to democratic citizenship. It can only be learned over time through practice in various settings. Today, the frightening breakdown of communication between opposing voices in our ‘post truth’ world reminds us how vital this is (Alexander, 2019). The rise of authoritarianism, populist demagoguery, and conspiracy theories underlines the importance of being willing and able to test voices. Even though museum visits are short, research indicates that because they take place in alternative learning spaces, they stand out in student memories (Falk & Dierking, 2012). Bakhtin’s dialogism contains a duality that shows both the dependence of others and the importance of finding one’s own voice.

The core of *subjectification* for a young person, according to Biesta, is to become subject in her or his own life. It has to do with the question of freedom, but not the freedom in the simplistic sense of doing just what one wants to do, “but the freedom to act in and with the world” (Biesta, 2020, p. 1). It is existential, as it is about how I exist as the subject, not as the object of what other people want from me or expect me to think. Simultaneously, I am part of a context and a network that puts limits on me. “One important aspect of trying to exist as a subject is to figure out what these limits are, which limits should be taken into consideration, which limits are real, and which limits are the effect of arbitrary (ab)use of power. The question of democracy has everything to do with the limits that our living together poses on our own freedom” (Ibid, p. 4).

It is important, however, that these ‘limits’ do not silence the young generation. Dialogic pedagogy is a safeguard against making disagreement illegitimate by insisting that

... an open-minded, honest commitment to ideas, knowledge, and skills requires the meeting of alternative ideas, the genuine listening to others, testing ideas, talking one's own and other people's positions seriously, and a commitment to searching for truth rather than to spread one's own dear ideas, manipulate others, and so on (Matusov & von Duyke, 2010, p.177).

This article about dialogic pedagogy in museum education has provided examples of how students engaged in dialogue developed their inner persuasive discourse by *testing* the authoritative word and standing up for their diverging views, also when they encountered resistance. A re-examination of accepted 'truths' was triggered by a few students who trusted their own judgment - not based on opinions, but on the investigation. It is a tiny incident with immense implications for education in our critical times, whatever context.

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