



## What good is it anyway? Professional dance artists legitimising their work for the Cultural Schoolbag in Norwegian schools

Joakim Karlsen & Kristine Høeg Karlsen

To cite this article: Joakim Karlsen & Kristine Høeg Karlsen (2022): What good is it anyway? Professional dance artists legitimising their work for the Cultural Schoolbag in Norwegian schools, Research in Dance Education, DOI: [10.1080/14647893.2022.2094909](https://doi.org/10.1080/14647893.2022.2094909)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14647893.2022.2094909>



© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 10 Jul 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 105



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

# What good is it anyway? Professional dance artists legitimising their work for the Cultural Schoolbag in Norwegian schools

Joakim Karlsen <sup>a</sup> and Kristine Høeg Karlsen <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Computer Sciences and Communication, Faculty of Computer Sciences, Engineering and Economics, Østfold University College, Halden, Norway; <sup>b</sup>Department of Education, ICT and Learning, Faculty of Teacher Education and Languages, Østfold University College, Halden, Norway

## ABSTRACT

This article examines how dance artists with extensive experience with *The Cultural Schoolbag* (TCS), a national programme for bringing the arts into schools, convey their rationale for working in TCS. Previous research has found that the artists' rationale for doing TCS-art is far from established and agreeing on what TCS-art should be or become is inherently difficult. The goal that TCS-art should contribute to the school's curriculum, potentially challenging the artists' freedom, continues to pose a challenge to TCS that has so far remained unresolved. Interviews with nine professional dancers show, that they to a little degree have been challenged to contribute to the school's curriculum and have had few problems establishing a rationale for doing TCS-art in line with being or becoming a professional dancer. Even if this rationale has been adapted to the socio-material conditions of performing TCS-art, it is seemingly within what can be accepted in the art world of dance in Norway.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 16 July 2021  
Accepted 23 June 2022

## KEYWORDS

Professional dance artists in education; arts-in-school programmes; art-school cooperation

## Introduction

The Cultural Schoolbag (TCS) reaches all schools in Norway and is 'one of the largest programmes in the world that aims to bring professional arts and culture to children' (Bamford 2012, 56). Similar arts-in-school programmes are widespread in the Western world such as the *Lincoln Center Institute* in New York City, USA, *Der Kulturrucksack NRW*, in North Rhine – Westphalia in Germany, *Creative School* in Sweden, and *Listaleyipurin* on the Faroe Islands (Catharina et al. 2015; Breivik and Christophersen 2013). These programmes have limited reach compared to TCS however (Breivik and Christophersen 2013, 16). This unique position enhances TCS's role as an example of a type of cultural initiative that are currently gaining momentum internationally. TCS started as a pilot in 2001 and during two decades of expansion it has become among the largest Norwegian cultural political measures, giving pupils aged 6 to 19 access to professional art and culture as part of their education. TCS is mandated by the Norwegian

**CONTACT** Joakim Karlsen  [joakim.karlsen@hiof.no](mailto:joakim.karlsen@hiof.no)  Department of Computer Sciences and Communication, Faculty of Computer Sciences, Engineering and Economics, Østfold University College, Halden, Norway

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

government: 1) to give pupils access to a wide range of cultural expressions so they can become acquainted with; and 2) understand culture in all its forms; and 3) to assist schools in integrating forms of cultural expression into their curriculum (Regjeringen 2007).

Even if TCS 'is referred to as one of the most important workplaces for freelance artists in Norway today' (Catharina et al. 2015, 43) there are few studies that investigate the artists' own direct experiences with TCS (Breivik 2013, 157). In our systematic literature review, we found 10 studies that include the artists' voice in the research, but only three of the ten has the artists' account of working in TCS as a primary concern (Digranes 2015; Breivik 2013; Berge 2009). While Berge (2009) and Breivik (2013) focus on artists representing various genres (from music, performance art, and cultural heritage), Digranes (2015) analyses national and local media texts published between 2002–2008 on TCS, limited to the visual arts. Reviewing all ten studies, none of them have dance art or dance artists as their main object of study. The review also uncovered a general lack of nuanced use of theory to understand artists' involvement and contributions to arts-in-school programmes. We believe it would be particularly useful to utilise social worlds theory such as Howard Becker's (1984), to move beyond the mostly idealistic discourse on the role of arts in education.

Becker's (1984) theory of art worlds has provided a lens in this study to understand how the dance artists legitimise their work for TCS. Many dance artists have become dependent on TCS touring over the years and the particular circumstances of this work, its socio-material conditions, challenge the established conventions of what constitutes a dance performance, with scant infrastructure, with no proper stage, with bare bones scenography, with no make-up and no crew. The conventions of a ramified dance performance are challenged, with a need for major adaptations. These adaptations of the conventional way of doing things in the art world of dance, need an aesthetic justification, of being framed as being a proper dance performance. In this, new conventions are aligned with the existing, and rationalised in continuation with existing artistic practice. Internationally, there is a need for more research on TCS and similar arts-in-education programmes from the artists' perspective, and more specifically on how the socio-material conditions of such programmes frame what is possible and not, how these conditions are negotiated when constructing a rationale, giving an answer to what the particular kind of artistic practice is good for? This leads to the following research questions.

What are the socio-material conditions for touring as a dance artist in TCS, as conveyed by professional dance artists?

How do dance artists, touring TCS, negotiate these conditions when rationalising TCS-dance-art?

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. After a more thorough review of related work and a summary of Becker's theory of art worlds, we will summarise the results from the interviews. After this, the implications of results will be discussed, before some concluding remarks will be made.

### **Artists working TCS**

In general, artists value the opportunity TCS provides to pursue paid artistic practice (Kleppe, Berge, and Marius Hylland 2009). TCS is reported as a good and secure source of income for artists which contributes to stability and predictability, enabling them to

make a living from their art (Berge 2009, 30) and plan for a longer timeframe (Kleppe, Berge, and Marius Hylland 2009, 47). Many artists experience TCS as 'a good opportunity to do paid performing work' (Kleppe, Berge, and Marius Hylland 2009, 46) and emphasise the 'benefits of artistic aspects of this, such as professional development, positive feedback from the public, space for collective and interdisciplinary collaboration, as well as project development' (Berge 2009, 36).

The competition in recent years has become extremely tough however, which makes it difficult for many artists to get 'a foot in the door' (Breivik 2013, 157; Catharina et al. 2015, 43). Consequently, artists report a need to nurture relationships with commissioning bureaucrats and become hesitant to come forward with criticisms for fear of losing assignments (Breivik 2013, 158). Censorship and moralism are common in TCS, with artists revealing that they have had to change or remove elements of shows that have been identified as being inappropriate or vulgar to the TCS audience. This has led some artists to say that they fear criticising their commissioner because they are afraid of losing their job (Breivik 2013; Catharina et al. 2015).

The precarity of TCS work has been reported, with artists taking a financial risk to cover production expenses and developing potential productions for the programme. Such risk is experienced strongly as creating art 'with a knife at one's throat' (Catharina et al. 2015, 43). In Kleppe, Berge, and Marius Hylland (2009) study, two of the artists say they get a fixed sum and have to produce 'as much music as possible for the money' (p. 47). They say that the amount is intended to cover everything from development and administration to rental cars and technical equipment. The artists say that it is then up to them 'to carry out the tour as cheaply as possible so that they can secure an adequate fee' (ibid.). This can affect the quality as low-cost solutions are chosen and the number of artists is reduced. In Berge's (2009) study, artists are concerned by the fact that TCS is not covering social benefits, securing income during sickness, maternity leave and unemployment and several of the artists say that they are 'scared of becoming ill during a tour, and that several times they have toured while under the weather or with a fever' (Berge 2009, 35).

Several of the respondents in Berge's (2009) study see 'touring life as a kind of lifestyle' (p. 35) where parallels are drawn to the lifestyle of drifters, gypsies, circus performers, rooted in a romantic charismatic myth of the artist (ibid.). Reference is made to rewarding days in TCS (Kleppe, Berge, and Marius Hylland 2009, 46), but days which are artistically and physically very exhausting (Berge 2009, 40). Life on the road allows for professional development, as they get to keep up with their art. The alternative for many of the artists is that their professional development would have come to a halt (Berge 2009, 37). Berge (2009) writes 'They [the artists] believe that they evolve through TCS because they can carry on with their art' (p. 37). Because competition is fierce, TCS is an important recruitment arena which give artists the opportunity to promote their careers, and TCS becomes a place where they can stand out (ibid.). It is also evident that, through TCS, artists get the opportunity to work with colleagues, draw on the ideas of others and support each other (Berge 2009, 38).

In summary TCS touring is seen by the artists as hard, competitive, risky but rewarding work, giving them the opportunity to perform their art. Now we will give an overview of how artists negotiate questions concerning quality in TCS.

### Questions concerning quality in TCS

Quality constitutes a common theme across the studies seeking to understand TCS from the artists' perspective. The concept of quality is something that concerns the artists (Holdhus et al. 2019, 33), and something that there are many different ideas about and tensions related to (Borgen and Brandt 2006, 112). Different hierarchies of quality, quality assessments and quality assurance of art, as well as quality stamping of artists, are also mentioned (Kleppe, Berge, and Marius Hylland 2009, 48–49). It is possible to derive two perspectives on quality in the context of TCS art, each with its own possibilities and barriers – an idealistic perspective and a pragmatic perspective.

#### *Idealistic perspective on what constitutes good TCS art*

The idealistic perspective is framed by the idea of free and independent art that in its most genuine form must under no circumstances be dictated, designed or adapted to the school's curricula or its specific audience. Digranes (2015) found evidence that this perspective has been dominating the public discourse on artists' role in TCS. From an analysis of national and local media texts published between 2002 and 2008 she derives eight stereotypical narratives about the collaboration between *the art world* and *the school world* in TCS;

- (1) The child – The student
- (2) Expansion of the cultural sector – The uneducated population
- (3) Artistic freedom – Restrictive administration
- (4) Art as salvation – School as oppression
- (5) Art as experience – Academic content
- (6) Saving the child – Limiting the student
- (7) Breaking boundaries – Rules and censorship
- (8) The fun hour – The incompetent teacher

According to Digranes (2015), these representations can be 'read as the story of the art world/the hero and the school world/the obstacle as two extremities in a narrative where the student must be saved by TCS, and where TCS constitutes the arena for this praiseworthy purpose' (p. 3). In this perspective, the artist is inspired to become a challenger and an outsider whose goal is to break with established truths and then liberate 'the child from the oppression of society' (p. 7). In this narrative, the teacher-obstacle represents the conformist and rule-governed environment that stands in the student's way 'by introducing censorship into free artistic practice' (ibid.). The stereotypes describe TCS artists that are entitled to artistic freedom (narrative 3), where the students' experience is at the centre, pitted against the curriculum and academic goals (narrative 5) and where the art must break boundaries in contrast to school content such as linear logic (narrative 7).

Other studies also state that professional, high-quality art happens when the artist is allowed to create freely. When the artists in Berge's (2009) study express that they 'may well get a bit a freer rein on what they want to show, what they have on their minds . . . ' (p. 48), this is argued in line with an idealistic perspective to what constitutes good TCS art. We also find similar statements made in Catharina et al. (2015), who write that some

artists in their study ‘clung to the idea of art’s autonomy, which seemed to entail an inclination to define artistic activities as being the opposite of those in schools or in education’ (p. 42). They find that ‘some cultural sector actors define their artistic activities as being in opposition to the school’s activities, a definition which results in an unsettled relationship with the school’ (Christophersen et al., 52).

In this perspective, art is perceived as having an inherent value, a liberating power or what Catharina et al. (2015, 44) refer to as ‘The transformative power of art’, with reference to the sociology of Rancière. When the artist is referred to with a capital A, this is linked by Kleppe, Berge, and Marius Hylland (2009, 48) to ‘the charismatic myth of the artist’ which, according to them, is ubiquitous in art worlds. With reference to Mangset (2004), Kleppe, Berge, and Marius Hylland (2009) write that the myth ‘can form the basis for hero worship and highlighting the *genius* artists’ (48).

What hinders high-quality art according to the idealistic perspective is primarily the moralism that exists within the TCS system, leading to the censorship of TCS productions and also to the artists censoring themselves. Breivik (2013) writes that this may involve avoiding themes such as ‘violence, death, sex and politics’ (p. 170). The other obstacle is the teacher (ref. Digranes 2015) which stands in the way of artists being able to pursue free artistic practice (p. 7).

### *Pragmatic perspective to what constitutes good TCS art*

In the pragmatic perspective to TCS art, dialogue, cooperation and student activity are valued and the artist perceives the cooperation with the school as desirable because it contributes to the quality of TCS visits. In Catharina et al.’s (2015) study, several artists discuss how they want real collaboration in TCS productions, as this provides the ‘mutual benefits of having artists and teachers working together’ (p. 42), and that they perceived it as being unproblematic to be ‘operating at the interface between art and school; on the contrary, they found it productive and constructive’ (ibid.). In the DiSko project, the musicians in the study represent artists who seek collaboration and want dialogue with the school (Holdhus et al. 2019). One artist puts it this way: ‘it feels good when the teacher “becomes part of the picture” and provides input regarding the planning of the activities’ (Holdhus et al. 2019, 26). Opening for dialogue with students in TCS productions, improves the work from by being ‘one-way communication where the artist feels alone, to dialogue and collaboration’ (ibid.). Borgen and Brandt’s (2006) register tensions between the cultural and school sectors, but find that artists working most closely with schools have gradually come up with dialogical communication models, relying on closer cooperation with teachers and students, and that they report no conflict between this and their professionalism.

In other words, artists within the pragmatic perspective perceive few contradictions between supplying art at a high level and collaborating with teachers and students on content and goals. In Berge’s (2009) study artists compare the TCS audience (i.e., the students), with other audiences, that they as artists ‘must consider and conform to different conditions [. . .] in order for the audience to be able to receive the art’ (p. 47). Based on these studies, there are two barriers that stand in the way of supplying high-quality TCS art, and both are linked to resources. Firstly, a TCS visit that promotes

dialogue is costly in comparison with what Borgen and Brandt (2006) refer to as ‘monological distribution models’ (p. 112), and secondly, it can be time-consuming to get artists, teachers and students to collaborate more (Holdhus et al. 2019, 248).

There is a pronounced tension between the two perspectives outlined above. Single artists can take on both idealistic and pragmatic impulses, leading them to different role-understandings in TCS. Breivik (2013) documents a clear tension between taking a more ‘modest craftsman’s role versus the maintenance of notions that the charismatic artist is still alive’ (p. 158). Several of the artists in Breivik’s (2013) study say that they ‘feel caught between different and partially conflicting requirements – concerning for example student participation, how the activities relate to the school’s curriculum, and creative restraint to their artistic production’ (p. 158).

### *Maintaining a rationale in art worlds*

The tensions between idealistic and pragmatic impulses are addressed in Becker’s sociological analysis of art worlds. He criticises romantic notions that individual artists have or should have a privileged position in society and emphasise art as everyday cooperative work. Art is, according to Becker (1984, p. ix), ‘the work some people do’ and art worlds is ‘the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of art works that art world is noted for’ (ibid., x). He develops a provisional list of cooperative activities that upholds an art world (ibid., 2–5), summarised in [Table 1](#). Works of art can be produced without all these activities performed, it just becomes a different work of art and these activities can be ‘performed in a variety of ways with an equal variety of results’ (ibid., 5). Becker, being a trained jazz musician, stresses that all activities are important for the making of an artwork, not only the ones undertaken by the artist, who often is understood as having special talents in the western tradition (ibid. 14).

To regulate the terms of cooperation between the many workers involved in producing an artwork and cover ‘all the decisions that must be made with respect to works produced’ (Becker, 1984, 14), conventions are necessary according to Becker (1984). He builds on this simple definition to explicate the importance of conventions for the workings of an art world. Conventions have many roles and are embedded differently depending on what kind of cooperative activity one is trying to understand. The roles conventions have is first, how conventions can be materially embodied and therefore constrain what kind of artwork that can be made and second, how conventions regulate the relationship between artists and audiences. In these terms the conventions for TCS-dance-art are embodied in the practice of touring TCS, and these conventions need to be legitimised by an updated rationale. The full account of the activity of maintaining a rationale is:

Another activity consists of creating and maintaining the rationale according to which all these other activities make sense and are worth doing. Rationales typically take the form, however naive, of a kind of aesthetic argument, a philosophical justification which identifies what is being made as art, as good art, and explains how art does something that needs to be done for people and society. Every social activity carries with it some such rationale, necessary for those moments when others not engaged in it ask what good it is anyway. Someone always asks such questions, if only the people engaged in the activity themselves.

**Table 1.** List of cooperative activities in art worlds.

ACTIVITY	EXPLANATION
Having an idea Executing the idea	<p>What kind of work to make and its specific form? The idea needs to be given a physical form, either as an object or a performance like a dance. This requires skills, training and judgement (ibid., 3).</p>
Manufacturing and distribution of materials and equipment needed.	This can be for example: 'musical instruments, paints and canvas, dancers' shoes and costumes, cameras and film' (ibid.).
Raising money to pay for time and equipment	This often, but not always, means raising money by distributing the works of art 'to audiences in return for some form of payment' (ibid.).
Supporting activities	This is everything that is needed to execute the art, both mundane activities like 'sweeping up the stage and bringing coffee', but also 'all sorts of technical activities – manipulating the machinery people use in executing the work' (ibid., 4).
Response and appreciation	The work needs response from an audience by creating an emotional or intellectual reaction to it that they appreciate (ibid.,). This activity must occur for an artwork to exist.
Creating and maintaining a rationale for all the above activities.	A rationale needs to be maintained, often in the form of an 'aesthetic argument, a philosophical justification which identifies what is being made as art, as good art, and explains how art does something that needs to be done for people and society' (ibid.). For a full definition of this activity see below:
Training	People need to know how to do all these things, including the audience, and someone must educate and train them (ibid., 5).
Maintaining order and stability	For all this to happen some stability and order needs to be in place, often in the hands of the state, through laws, regulation and support.



Subsidiary to this is the specific evaluation of individual works to determine whether they meet the standards contained in the more general justification for that class of work or whether, perhaps, the rationale requires revision. Only by this kind of critical review of what has been and is being done can participants in the making of art works decide what to do as they move on to the next work. (Becker, 1984, 4)

This cooperative work, undertaken by dance artists of maintaining a rationale for TCS-dance-art is the main focus in this article.

## Materials and methods

The study was based on a constructivist and qualitative research design where semi-structured face-to-face interviews (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015) were conducted with a total of nine dance artists in an attempt to explore how they understand their position and role in the productions that tour TCS. The interview data was transcribed and analysed in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis, and ethical issues have been considered in line with Brinkmann and Kvale's (2015) six research steps, throughout the project (p. 85). We obtained oral and written informed consent from all participants in the study. In the following, we will describe the procedures for collection and the preparation of the script before we present the data and outline how the data were analysed.

### *Finding, selecting and presenting the dance artists*

From 2004 to 2018 many of the stakeholders in TCS collaborated to develop and maintain an information system to share information about and plan TCS activities. The research project contacted the firm tasked to develop and maintain the system and asked for data on all TCS productions recorded in the underlying database. After several small iterations we received a dataset recording 10093 productions with: title, owner, year, semester, artist, level and genre. In Figure 1, we provide a chart depicting the distribution of genres in the dataset, with performing arts (including dance and music) accounting for over 50% of the activity in TCS. After cleaning up the data we ran a simple query to identify the most active dance artists in TCS. This list was used to recruit informants to our study, the nine most prominent dance artists touring TCS in the south-east of Norway the last two decades (informants' #1–9).

The informants' TCS productions span a variety of dance styles, from dance theatre/impro and theatre sports (#1, 6, 7, 9), creative dance (#3, 4), break/hip-hop/parkour and acrobatic (#2, 6, 9), to folk dance (#7), summarised in Table 2. Four of the informants are professional dancers with education from The Academy of Dance, *Oslo National Academy of the Arts*, KHIO (#1, 5, 7), and the Bårdar Academy in Oslo (#2); one is both a professional dancer and professional dance teacher with one-year practice-oriented teacher training course for dance teachers from KHIO in addition to the formal dance education at The Academy of Dance, KHIO (#9); three are professional dance teachers, with education from *The Norwegian Ballet Academy*, DNBH<sup>1</sup> (#4, 8) and from the *Foundation in Dance Instruction*, FDI/ISTD, London (#3); and finally, one is self-taught with no formal dance education (#6).

## Art forms in TCS 2004-2018

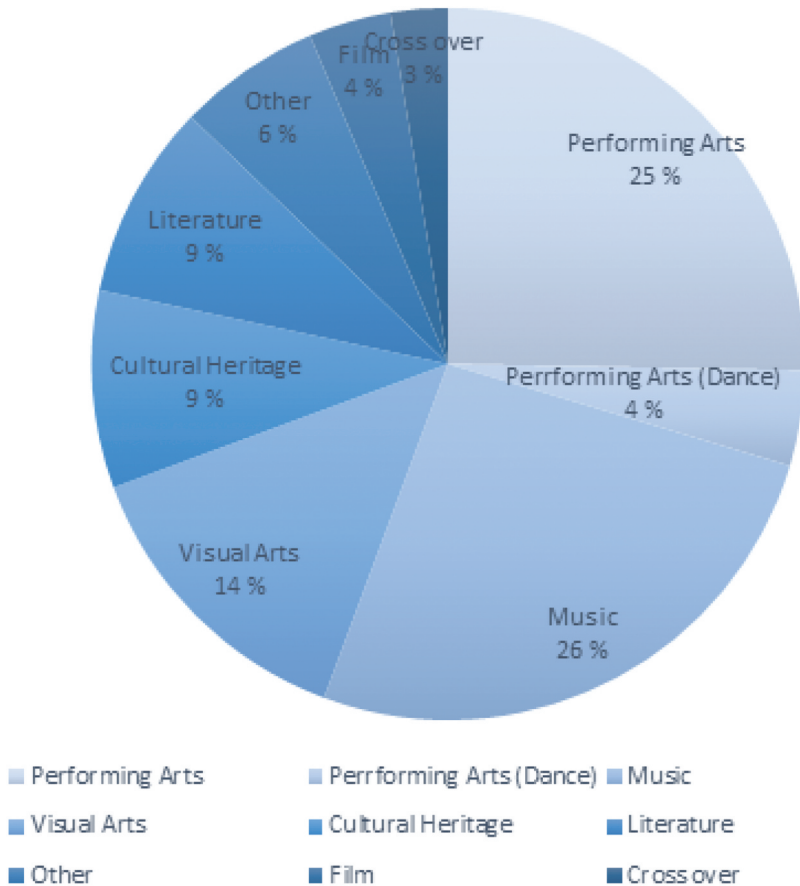


Figure 1. Art forms in TCS.

Thematically, the TCS productions brought to schools by these dance artists address a number of topics. The most prominent is *mental health*, related to friendship and bullying (#1, 4, 5, 7, 9), stereotypes and freaks (#1, 6), mental illness (self-harm and eating disorders) (#8), family affairs (#5) and the meaning of life (#3, 6). One of the informants said, '[The production] was about bullying and broken hearts; to be in love with someone who doesn't like you back' (#7). Further, three productions referred to by these artists, concern more *subject-specific* topics such as; music history (#2), World War II and the attack on Finnmark (#7), and Norse mythology (#6). Informant #2 puts it like this, 'the curriculum says that the pupils should learn some music history and dance during the year [...] I designed a workshop involving music history focusing on hip hop, where it originates from'. Finally, there is one *meta-art production* where the artist invites the pupils into the performance allowing them to express what they want TCS



Table 2. Overview informants.

No.	FORMAL EDUCATION	STYLE	THEME(S)
Case #1	Professional dancer	Dance theatre/impro and theatre sports	Mental health (Friendship and bullying, stereotypes and freaks)
Case #2	Professional dancer	Break/hip-hop/parkour and acrobatic	Subject-specific (Music history)
Case #3	Professional dance teacher	Creative dance	Mental health (Meaning of life)
Case #4	Professional dance teacher	Creative dance	Mental health (Friendship and bullying)
Case #5	Professional dancer	Creative dance/Dance theatre/impro and theatre sports	Mental health (Friendship and bullying/family affairs)
Case #6	No formal dance education	Dance theatre/impro and theatre sports/break/hip-hop/parkour and acrobatic	Mental health (Stereotypes and freaks/meaning of life)
Case #7	Professional dancer	Dance theatre/impro and theatre sports/Folk dance	Subject-specific (Norse mythology)
Case #8	Professional dance teacher	Dance (works as a choreographer)	Mental health (Friendship and bullying)/Subject-specific (World War I)
Case #9	Professional dancer/ Professional dance teacher	Dance theatre/break/hip-hop/parkour and acrobatic	Mental health (Mental illness)/ Meta-art production
			Mental health (Friendship and bullying)

productions to contain (#8). In the interview, the dance artist questions, ‘Who knows what children want, and should you give them what they want? [This] was a meta performance; a performance about performance’.

### *Preparing for and conducting the interviews*

Prior to the interviews, an interview guide covering three main topics was developed including a total of 27 suggested questions. The topics were related to the participants’ 1) perceptions of their professional lives as dance artists in Norway, and how the productions that tour the schools fit in that, 2) reflections on their positions and roles in the productions that tour the schools today, and 3) opinions of how the productions that tour the schools should be designed in the future to work optimally for them as professional artists. The structure of the guide allowed for flexibility in relation to the order of the topics and proposed questions and for following up interesting leads. The interview questions were designed in accordance with Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), to contain a *thematic dimension*, contributing knowledge relevant to the research problem, and a *dynamic dimension*, to contribute to flow in the conversation and a positive interaction during the interview (p. 157). The questions were formulated in non-academic language, with the purpose of being easy for the participants to understand. Examples of questions from the interview guide are, i) can you describe what it is like for you being a dance artist within TCS, ii) what it is like to meet children and youth as the audience in the productions that tour the schools, and iii) what is your position and role in the productions?

### *Analysing the data*

All the interviews were recorded with the consent of the informants using a hand-held device with a high-quality microphone (cf., Bryman 2016, 479). During the interviews, we avoided as far as possible, background noise, to make the recording as audible as possible for the transcriber (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015, 205). An experienced professional transcriber (cf., Bryman 2016, 481) translated the sound recordings to a written form close to verbatim (including e.g. pauses, laughter) based on clear procedures for typing (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015, 207). To raise the transcriber reliability, the quality of the transcription was compared to the audio recordings (Bryman 2016, 483), and found accurate for the analysis and purpose of the research (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015, 206). However, to make the quotes more readable, they were transcribed and changed into a more formal style by the researchers themselves (ibid., 214).

The coding of the transcripts were guided by what Braun and Clarke (2006) refer to as a latent thematic analysis (p. 11). This approach is overlapping with discourse analysis (ibid., 13) as it aims to examine the ‘broader assumptions, structures and/or meanings’ underpinning the participants’ utterances (ibid., 13). The analysis resulted in a thematic map (ibid., 19) and involved four separate phases of ‘constant moving back and forward between the entire data set, the coded extracts of data that you are analysing, and the analysis of the data you are producing’ (ibid., 15). In this part, the objective is to bring explicitness into the phases of coding and analysis in terms of making the results transferable.

The entire data set was read through ‘in an *active* way’ (ibid., 16) to familiarise ourselves with the overall meaning of the interviews. We began searching for interesting aspects and initial patterns in the transcripts, making notes and ideas for codes in the margin. An example could be the concept of *identification* used as a code in the following data extract, ‘When making art for children and young people, you choose a topic which they can recognise themselves in’ (#8). With a list of notes and codes, the second phase involved the data-driven coding process using software for coding, retrieving and analysing data. In this phase of the analysis, data were systematically organised into meaningful codes. Each data item, was according to Braun and Clarke (2006) given ‘full and *equal* attention’ (p. 18), developing a basis for emerging themes (ibid., 18). As the outcome of the analysis at this time was unknown, we coded ‘for as many potential themes/patterns as possible’ (ibid., 19). In our project, what Braun and Clarke (2006) refer to as phases 3–5 of the analysis, constitutes phase 3, which includes the search for, the refinement of, and the naming of themes.

## Results

In the following, the results are reported according to the research questions guiding our study.

### *Socio material conditions for TCS-dance-art*

The dance artists in our study appreciate working for TCS and explicitly state that they have enjoyed touring TCS (#3, #4, #5, #6 and #7). Being on tour with TCS has been nice (#3, #6), rewarding (#4), pleasurable and friendly (#5). Further, they convey that the salary and contracts they get in TCS have been good. About half of them have earned more than 50% of their yearly income from touring TCS, with the rest varying from 10% to 40%. Several of them have valued the opportunity to do paid work as a performing dancer, giving them the resources to do other projects. Informant #9 says that TCS has saved her from working all her time in stores:

TCS has saved me. [...] I can afford singing lessons so that I can do musical auditions. The reason I have been able to continue as a dancer, and have kept myself afloat, is doing a couple of TCS tours every year. (#9)

The artists in our study seem to agree that TCS has been good for their careers by giving them the opportunity to become professional dance artists. Informants #4 and #7 emphasise that TCS gave them a start when it was difficult to get casted by the established dance institutions. Informant #5 claim that TCS work has been crucial for her to pursue a career as a professional dancer, and #9 says she has used TCS to get further jobs at the opera house and the national traveling theatre. It seems that TCS is an arena where artists can be seen (#6, #1) and get recognition (#3). Several of the artists seem to agree that working with TCS has gained status over the years and is now something most professional dancers in Norway would want to do (#3–6). Famous choreographers have started their careers in TCS (#5) and recruiting highly recognised artists into TCS has mattered a lot for the increase in status. Informant #6 put it like this:

TCS has become more and more accepted among dance artists, and that has a lot to do with who works for TCS. If you have good artists in TCS, no one dares to say anything negative about it. (#6)

Another reason for the increase in status could be that the competition between artists to work with TCS has grown harder. The artists, especially #3, #4 and #5 report that it is rather difficult, and increasingly so, to get TCS shows commissioned. This said, several of the informants still admit that touring TCS comes second to performing with bigger productions on bigger stages. Informant #1 conveyed that dancing with the opera, and dancing in TCS are ‘two different worlds’ (#1). According to informant #3, working on the West End beats working in TCS anytime. When asked about how TCS was talked about when she did her dance education, informant #9 says:

You hear about the students that have ended up doing bigger shows, on bigger stages with famous choreographers. You never hear about the girl that was lost in TCS. (#9)

The material ramifications of touring TCS directly and indirectly conditions what’s possible to make and what’s not. Two obvious examples conveyed by the informants, concerned the lack of performing space and time restraints given by the school’s scheduling practice. Dance artists in TCS often need to perform in a superficially converted gymnasium of varying sizes, with makeshift seating for the audience, with a consequence that they should be able to perform the show in a relatively small area limiting both the number of dancers taking part and the scenography they can set up. They still aim to create an illusion of a proper stage, a proper dance show, but are limited by the need to bring only light and portable scenography. Further, the dancers talk about the need to lengthen or shorten their show to fit the school’s schedule which often consists of 45-minute periods.

We had usually done 5–10-minute shows. They wanted 45 minutes! That was a shock. What were we going to perform that would entertain children for 45 minutes? (#6)

Later I did [a show] which was a large production for [a stage] and which was very long. Over an hour and very physical. The show was cut to exactly 45 minutes to fit the school day . . . (#5)

These examples of how the material ramifications of touring TCS directly influence the dance performances is telling when it comes to understanding the conventions that have been established in TCS-dance-art, and how these conventions need to be accounted for in rationalising TCS-dance-art as something good and worthwhile. This leads to how our results shed light on the second research question, how the artists in our study have been able to rationalise TCS touring as legitimate work for a professional dance artist.

### *Negotiating a rationale for TCS-art*

When it comes to legitimising TCS as proper work for professional dancers, the artists interviewed in this study emphasise how TCS brings dance to children and youngsters that would never have experienced dance otherwise. They see themselves as reaching out, creating immediate (#1), engaging (#4), touching (#1, #7), explorative (#5), fun (#6) and intimate (#1) experiences of dance art. They believe their performances educate the

students (and the teachers) about themselves and the world they live in by provoking, triggering and opening up for reflection and dialogue. Several of the artists think it is very rewarding to dance for young children, emphasising their spontaneity as an audience (#6, #4). From having less status as an audience (#4), children and youth now have equal status (#3). There seemed to be some disagreement among the interviewees though, with informant #8 saying that children's show will never have the same status as a show for grown-ups. Informant #5 thinks the increase in status has to do with the fact that younger audiences have become really important economically for the performing art institutions. Relevant to this is how the informants believe they contribute to training children to become members of an audience, many of them having little previous experience with live art performances. Informant #9 says:

... if you have a group of students who are not used to seeing art, you need to talk about how they are expected to behave. When it comes to using mobile phones, taking pictures, clapping ... taking the jacket off or on? [...] Is it really a good idea to keep the Canada Goose jacket on, becoming warm, triggering the need to take it off during the performance? (#9)

Beyond training children to become an audience and to give them eye opening insights from experiencing dance art, TCS is mandated to assist schools in integrating forms of cultural expression into their curriculum. We brought this up in the interviews and several of the dance artists stated explicitly that they think TCS art should have a free relationship to the school's curriculum. Informant #7 states: 'I get a rash thinking about the school's curriculum as defining what kind of art is created' (#7). Several of the artists have no strong opinion on the matter however and state an openness towards linking their TCS performances to the school's curriculum. They make clear that this is something they haven't really thought much about, or only briefly considered by linking their performance to a topic they understand is part of the school's curriculum, like music history (#2), cultural history (#6) or life skills (#9). It is evident that the dance artists are either mildly interested in/indifferent to or explicitly against integrating their TCS art into the school's curriculum.

Tellingly, the teachers in the artists' accounts are given roles as either part of the audience and/or practical helper. They give the teachers relatively little credit when it comes to understanding their performances, both as art and as skilled work. Informants #1 and #2 don't think the teachers have the necessary competence to contribute to giving the students dance instruction as part of the normal curriculum in physical education. As informant #2 states: '... they have chosen a different path' (#2). Informant #4 emphasises how teachers lack an understanding of dance art, what is good and what is not. According to #5, this lack of understanding often leads to anxiety and fear with the teachers. She thinks this is unnecessary and encourages teachers to articulate more often what they think and be open and relaxed when discussing these thoughts. The distinction between dance artists and teachers is clearly summarised by informant #6 who expects the teachers to prepare and facilitate for TCS visits but doesn't expect them to either understand the art performances given or to have the performative skills needed to participate in any meaningful way.

### *Summarising the results*

The artists see themselves as providing high quality and varied ‘cultural experiences’ for the pupils that to a little degree are integrated with the ongoing learning activities in schools. The teachers are portrayed as ‘guards’ or ‘facilitators’ and are at best understood as part of the audience alongside the pupils. TCS is viewed as a legitimate workplace for professional dancers and framed as one of several arenas where dance artists can perform their art. This arena is different from, let’s say the opera houses, but still a ‘stage’ that matters.

It is possible to see how the artists frames TCS activities in a language that legitimises TCS as an art world according to how Becker characterises them. The professional dancers (seen as having a special role in society) are on tour, performing a set choreography, presenting an artistic vision often developed by themselves, meeting an appreciative audience, receiving acknowledgements and rewards, and are getting paid properly (not from tickets, but from the government lottery fund). According to these accounts, it seems like the school setting could easily be substituted or replaced by any other similar arena for dance art, like an institutional dance theatre for children.

### **Discussion**

This study has to a large degree confirmed earlier findings concerning the socio-material conditions of touring TCS. It seems that the accounts given by our informants add to an understanding of TCS as really hard, precarious but also rewarding work in line with previous research (Kleppe, Berge, and Marius Hylland 2009; Berge 2009; Catharina et al. 2015; Breivik 2013). When it comes to the question of quality, the informants mostly express notions in line with an idealistic understanding as described in the literature (Digranes 2015; Kleppe, Berge, and Marius Hylland 2009; Berge 2009; Catharina et al. 2015). They give their audience (children) access to experiences that they wouldn’t otherwise get. When it comes to pragmatic notions of quality as discussed in previous studies (Catharina et al. 2015; Holdhus et al. 2019; Borgen and Brandt 2006; Breivik 2013), they don’t seem to be ‘on the radar’ of our informants. There could be many explanations for this lack of engagement, but we believe that the main reason for this, is that the dance artists haven’t really been challenged to cooperate more closely with schools and to consider how their show contributes to the school’s curriculum. They have been allowed to interpret, understand, and experience their work for TCS as being an extension of their art world of dance. The dancers have adapted their work to the socio-material conditions of touring TCS and have found ways to rationalise these adaptations without dismissing the notion that TCS is a stage like any other stage in the art world of dance in Norway. As a consequence, the answer to the question; What is TCS-dance-art good for? – becomes very similar to the answer to; What is dance art good for?

The rationale for TCS-dance-art, as conveyed by our informants, to a little degree accounts for the third mandate for this art-in-school programme, that schools should be assisted in integrating forms of cultural expression into their curriculum. The interviews show that the artists have few experiences with and reflections on how dance shows commissioned for TCS can play together with the school’s curriculum. Based on this



finding, we see the need to explore new answers to the question: What is TCS-dance-art good for? By both dance artists touring TCS with stakeholders from the 'school world', most prominently teachers. Together they need to develop a new rationale for TCS-dance-art that to a larger degree captures the intentions of TCS as an arts-in-school programme. Informed by Bowker and Leigh Star (2002), who build on Becker's theory, we suggest several actions that could help the main stakeholders in TCS to: 1) articulate the current rationale for TCS-dance-art more clearly, 2) challenge this rationale by interventions, and 3) establish a new and more inclusive rationale.

*Articulating the current rationale:* This study contributes to articulating the current rationale for TCS-dance-art. In addition, the organisation responsible for the programme, Arts for young audiences Norway, actively promotes the programme in workshops, seminars, etc., and according to the mandate given by the government. To some extent the three goals are familiar to most of TCS stakeholders. The artists in our study, however, have little or no knowledge of how to achieve the third goal, to assist schools in integrating forms of cultural expression into their curriculum. It seems that the third goal is 'under-communicated' in the daily running of the programme, in TCS as working practice. The challenge then is to articulate the third goal where it matters in creating, proposing, selecting, producing, and performing TCS Art.

*Challenging the current rationale:* Several research projects have explicitly aimed to explore paths to strengthen the school's role in productive teacher–artist partnership. The recently finished DiSko project (Holdhus et al. 2019) funded by the Research Council of Norway (RCN), facilitated innovation-processes involving university-based researchers, musician–teacher in schools and professional visiting musician (Holdhus 2019). Another project, Dance Partners for Creativity (Chappell et al. 2009), aimed to revitalise dance education in schools. By creating powerful places for knowledge sharing between dance artists, dance teachers and university researchers, the project put focus on varied types of artist–teacher partnerships and how they could be developed (ibid., p. 177). A new project, pARTiCiPED,<sup>2</sup> explicitly aims to challenge the current rationale of TCS in three participatory labs, with student teachers, teachers, artists, students and scholars. The project is informed by the principles of participatory design, most notably that the participants shall have a voice, be heard and become part of processes securing mutual learning (Kensing and Greenbaum 2013).

*Establishing a new rationale:* To develop a new rationale in TCS, rooted in new democratic practices, and characterised by mutual learning, is a daunting and long-term task. It is possible to develop a new policy for TCS with consequences for its implementation on all levels, from the state-run *Arts for young audiences Norway*, through the regional TCS managers in the regional councils, to the TCS coordinators in the local councils (school owners). Clear and unambiguous guidelines can be developed to regulate how TCS projects shall be created, proposed, selected, produced and performed. A second and long-term approach is to educate and re-educate teachers with the aim of strengthening their role in TCS, by giving them the competence to participate in the encounters with the cultural sector in TCS. This is the strategy followed by pARTiCiPED, with a focus on student teachers.

## Conclusion

In this article, we have investigated how dance artists experience working for *The Cultural Schoolbag*, one of the largest arts-in-school programmes in the world, how working for the program has conditioned their art and how they have been able to rationalise this. The results suggest that TCS has become an attractive workplace for many dance artists, giving them the opportunity to secure a livelihood as professional artists. Even if touring TCS is hard and cumbersome, with heavy constraint on what is possible to show, the artists have been able to rationalise TCS-dance-art as equal to dance art in general. Even though the third stated goal for the program is to assist schools in integrating forms of cultural expression into their curriculum, the artists are either mildly interested in/indifferent to or explicitly against integrating their TCS art with the school's curriculum. When discussing this finding, we claim that a new rationale needs to be explored to accommodate for achieving more synergy between TCS-dance-art and the school's curriculum and suggest three participatory and inclusive activities to this end – to articulate the current rationale, to challenge it and to develop a new rationale that to a larger degree accommodates for the mandate given TCS.

We conclude by asking the pertinent question; is an aligned rationale possible, ensuring mutuality between artists and teachers when collaborating in TCS? Would new guidelines, ensuring teachers participation in having ideas, making selections, producing and performing TCS shows work well for the artists interviewed in this study? The answer is probably no, since a more heavy-handed policy to secure participation and collaboration in the making of TCS-dance-art would probably delegitimise TCS-dance-art in the Norwegian art world of dance. The dancers, identifying themselves as being part of this art world, would be more likely to reject TCS as something worthwhile. This again could lead to problems with recruiting 'the best' dance artists to TCS, with the risk that TCS would fail in its mandate that pupils should be exposed to professional art of the highest quality. Based on this reasoning, it is possible to claim that it is extremely challenging to develop and implement effective policies to achieve both goals 1 and 3 at the same time in the mandate given TCS. Even if it is challenging, however, a third rationale needs to be established for TCS that is attractive enough for most artists, and where the teachers are given more agency in ensuring that TCS-dance-art is a worthwhile activity for Norwegian schools. The rationale need to explicitly bridge art and learning, artistic practice and teaching practice, dance shows and school lessons. TCS art should neither be rationalised and appropriated by the school world, nor by the art world of dance. Attempts at appropriation should be challenged and replaced by activities to secure mutual learning and respect between members of both worlds. Established practitioners, both artists and teachers, have been willing to engage in activities to create a shared rationale for TCS. We hypothesize, however, that change will be better accommodated for by engaging artist students and teacher students in such activities, before they have been fully socialised as members of their respective social worlds. This approach is currently being explored in pARTiciPED, challenging dance students and teacher students to

develop TCS-dance-art together, with promising early results when it comes to both student group's willingness experiment with, and establish a shared rationale for TCS art.

## Notes

1. Recently merged with *Kristiania University College*.
2. <https://www.hiof.no/lu/english/research/projects/participed/>

## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the Oslofjord fund (project number: 282486) who financed this research project. We are also grateful for the KSYS support providing the database including all TCS productions recorded from 2004 to 2018. We are also thankful for the conversations with Jorunn Spord Borgen in this process. Finally, we would like to express our very great appreciation to John MacDonald for the excellent proofreading of the manuscript, and further the Faculty of Education at Østfold University College for financing this.

Joakim Karlsen is currently an associate professor at the Faculty of Computer Sciences, Engineering and Economics at Østfold University College. He holds a PhD in computer science from the University of Oslo, and his main research interest is how new media technologies challenges and transforms work in the cultural sectors. Karlsen has a background as a documentary filmmaker and has researched participatory modes of documentary online. A focus in his research has been on developing sound theoretical understandings of cultural work and how this work is adapting to processes of digitalisation. He currently focuses on designing tools for empowering museum curators to create digital experiences of archaeological sites and has recently produced *gillestadstory.com* – visualising a recent discovery of a Viking burial ground in Halden, Norway. Further, he works with similar tools to empower both teachers and museum curators to collaborate in making compelling and meaningful cultural heritage experiences in The Cultural Schoolbag. He leads a work package focusing on this in *pARTiciPED, Empowering student teachers for cross-sectorial collaborations with The Cultural Schoolbag (TCS) in Norwegian Schools* funded by the Research Council Norway (2021–2023).

Kristine Høeg Karlsen is currently an associate professor at the Faculty of Teacher Education and Languages at Østfold University College (ØUC). She is the project manager for the research project *pARTiciPED, Empowering student teachers for cross-sectorial collaborations with The Cultural Schoolbag (TCS) in Norwegian Schools* funded by the Research Council Norway, which aims to develop new knowledge on CSCs that move past the identified contradictions among the arts, culture and educational sectors in TCS. Karlsen holds a PhD in educational science from the Department of Education at the University of Oslo in Norway. She is also educated as a schoolteacher from Oslo Metropolitan University. Karlsen has been member, board member and vice-chairman of Centre for dance practice in school, education and research (SANS) for 15 years. She helped establish the Nordic Journal of Dance: practice, education and research in 2010, and was the journals first editor. Karlsen has been both teaching and researching dance and aesthetics at the teacher education programme at ØUC for several years, as part of Cross Institutional Collaboration both together with University College of Dance Art (UCDA) and SANS. Her research interests are cross-disciplinary teaching, aesthetic approaches to learning, arts education, student active learning approaches, and supervision.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Funding

This work was supported by the Regionale forskningsfond Oslofjordfondet [282486].

## ORCID

Joakim Karlsen  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6901-0299>

Kristine Høeg Karlsen  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4267-8421>

## References

- Bamford, A. 2012. *Arts and Cultural Education in Norway*. Bodø: Nasjonalt senter for kunst og kultur i opplæringen.
- Becker, H. S. 1984. *Art Worlds*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- Berge, O. K. 2009. "Fem historier om Kulturskatten: Effekten av oppdrag for Kulturskatten for fem kunstnarar og kunsten deira i Telemark." Working paper 3/210. TF notat. Telemarkforskning. <https://openarchive.usn.no/usn-xmlui/handle/11250/2439517>
- Borgen, J. S., and S. S. Brandt. 2006. *Ekstraordinært eller selvfølgelig? Evaluering av Den kulturelle skolesekken i grunnskolen*. Oslo: NIFU STEP. NIFU STEP-rapport 5–2006. <https://nifu.brage.unit.no/nifu-xmlui/handle/11250/275575>
- Bowker, G. C., and S. Leigh Star. 2002. "How to Infrastructure." In *Handbook of New Media: Student Edition*, edited by A. Leah Lievrouw, Livingstone, S. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE. 12.
- Braun, V., and V. Clarke. 2006. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2): 77–101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp0630a.
- Breivik, J.-K., and C. Christophersen. 2013. *Den Kulturelle skolesekken*. Oslo, Bergen: Kulturrådet Fagbokforlaget. [http://kulturradet.no/vis-publikasjon/-/asset\\_publisher/N4dG/content/publikasjon-den-kulturelle-skolesekken](http://kulturradet.no/vis-publikasjon/-/asset_publisher/N4dG/content/publikasjon-den-kulturelle-skolesekken)
- Breivik, J.-K. 2013. "Kampen Om Kunsten: Kunstneres Erfaringer." In *Den Kulturelle Skolesekken*, edited by C. Christophersen and J.-K. Breivik, 154–178. Oslo, Bergen: Kulturrådet Fagbokforlaget.
- Brinkmann, S., and S. Kvale. 2015. *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage.
- Bryman, A. 2016. *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Catharina, C., J.-K. Breivik, A. D. Homme, and L. H. Rykkja. 2015. *The Cultural Rucksack; a National Programme for Arts and Culture in Norwegian Schools*. Oslo, Bergen: Kulturrådet, Fagbokforlaget. [https://www.norskeserier.no/\\_the-cultural-rucksack-9788270811687](https://www.norskeserier.no/_the-cultural-rucksack-9788270811687)
- Chappell, K., A. Craft, L. Rolfe, and V. Jobbins. 2009. "Dance Partners for Creativity: Choreographing Space for Co-participative Research into Creativity and Partnership in Dance Education." *Research in Dance Education* 10 (3): 177–197. doi:10.1080/14647890903324147.
- Digranes, I. 2015. "Den kulturelle skolesekken – Kvalitetsskule eller kulturarroganse?" *FormAkademisk - forskningstidsskrift for design og designdidaktikk* 8 (2). 2. doi:10.7577/formakademisk.714.
- Holdhus, K. 2019. "The Polyphony of Musician–Teacher Partnerships: Towards Real Dialogues?" *Thinking Skills and Creativity* 31 (March): 243–251. doi:10.1016/j.tsc.2019.01.001.
- Holdhus, K., R. Waade, J. Cisar Romme, R. Almås, and M. Espeland. 2019. "Skole og konsert - fra formidling til dialog (DiSko): Erfaringsrapport." CASE 2019/1. Center for Creativities, Arts and Science in Education (CASE). <https://hvlopen.brage.unit.no/hvlopen-xmlui/handle/11250/2651920>

- Kensing, F., and J. Greenbaum. 2013. "Heritage:Having a Say." In *Routledge International Handbook of Participatory Design*, edited by J. Simonsen and T. Robertson, 21–37. London: Routledge.
- Kleppe, B., O. K. Berge, and O. Marius Hylland. 2009. "Kvalitet og forankring: En evaluering av Den kulturelle skolesekken i Rogaland." TF-rapport 259. Telemarksforskning. <https://openarchive.usn.no/usn-xmlui/handle/11250/2439525>
- Mangset, P. 2004. "*Mange er kalt, men få er utvalgt*": *Kunstnerroller i endring*'. (Vol. 215). Bø: Telemarksforskning. <https://openarchive.usn.no/usn-xmlui/handle/11250/2439515>
- Regjeringen. 2007. "Kulturell skulesekk for framtida." *Stortingsmelding*. (Vol. 8, 2007–2008). Oslo: Kultur- og kirke departementet.