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‘Don’t We Have a Storyline?’ Negotiating Devising Strategy in a Nordic-Baltic Teacher Education Programme’s Artistic Production

Torunn Bakken Hauge
Bergen University College, Norway

Anne Synnøve Paulsen
Bergen University College, Norway

Siv Ødemotland
Bergen University College, Norway

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Abstract

This article investigates the process of devising strategy in an intercultural Baltic-Nordic setting. Sixty teacher education participants collaborated on an interdisciplinary artistic production based on Norwegian folk beliefs and wights through an intensive, week-long program called Nordplus. Using this as a case study, we explored how the devised approach functioned within the given context and examined the dilemmas and challenges that the teachers faced. We chose a qualitative, ethnographic and descriptive approach, collecting data through

observations, questionnaires and interviews. The analysis yielded a variety of insights into the process of devising strategy, specifically within the context of diverse tutorial practices and cultural backgrounds, and the teacher's role in it.



The three alluring Huldras

Background

*So many strong personalities with so many opinions....
And the result... Great!!*

Our opening quotation is from a Danish student participating in an intensive international Nordplus course at Bergen University College (BUC) in Norway, which concluded with a performance called *SPOR (TRACES)*. The ambitious program brought together individuals from several different countries who had no prior knowledge of Norwegian folk beliefs – the majority of whom were music students with limited experience in drama, dance or visual art – to put together a performance in one week.

Intensive courses and exchange programmes, such as Nordplus and Erasmus, are common features of European systems for higher education cooperation. Teachers and students from various institutions across several countries come together for an intensive period to work.

Within the aesthetic subjects, the aim may be to create a performance or a presentation. As lecturers in teacher education, we have experience in innovative international cooperation, both as participating teachers and as workshop leaders. Additionally, we have experience in managing and participating in other artistic projects, both at BUC and in the local community. Despite this experience, we still find it very challenging to lead such projects – and especially to organise the more democratic kinds of projects – using the *devising strategy* (known as *collaborative creation* in the US), which is an approach that involves both students and teachers in the processes of collective decision-making. Artistically *devised* project work can be described as creating a performance collaboratively, rather than interpreting from a play text that someone else has already written (Oddey, 1997, p. 1). The questions inevitably raised in such contexts include: How 'democratic' should one be? Whose voices are to be heard, and when?

The project, entitled *Mythology, Culture and Identity in the Nordic and Baltic Countries*, was a three-year Nordic-Baltic programme offered within the Nordplus' Teacher Education Network (TEN, 2016) and consisted of three intensive one-week courses. During the first intensive course, held in Iceland in 2011, the participants developed a public performance called *Voluspá*, based on the Norse poem of the same name. In Bergen in 2013, the participants developed a public performance on the theme of specific wights within Norwegian folk belief; this course is the focus of this study.

The encyclopedia *Store Norske Leksikon* defines Norwegian folk belief as the 'magical and mythical beliefs and conclusions that do not coincide with the beliefs of accepted religious communities, or that fall outside established scientific experience'. The concept of *wights*, often discussed alongside underground people and gnomes, comprises seven creatures – *Tusser, Draugen, Nøkken, Fossegrimen, Hulder, Trolls and Elves* – that represent both genders, the coast and inland and the north and south.

To ensure the group produced a presentation of the highest quality, an experienced teacher and performer was named stage director. On the first day of the programme, before the practical creative process began, the participants were given several inspirational inputs, including a lecture, two concerts and a theatre performance, on the subject of the seven wights. The participants were also divided into cross-national groups and asked to complete a land art task, which involved creating outdoor habitats for the wights. Land art involves directly sculpting the landscape into earthworks or building structures using natural materials, such as rocks or twigs.



Creating a Troll habitat

The students were divided into groups according to their interests: music, dance, drama, costumes and scenography and their preferred wight. In the workshops, the students and teachers were invited to present creative ideas, on equal terms. The teachers were asked to encourage, facilitate and guide, rather than impose their own interpretations and ideas. The students still benefitted from the teachers' expertise, however, and thereby they together raised the quality of the final production. The 20-minute performance was called SPOR. It may seem naive to think it possible to implement a devising project like this, or that it could result in a worthwhile audience experience; however, this study does not discuss the reception issues. The group represented six nationalities, which are presented in the table below.

Nations	Latvia	Estonia	Iceland	Denmark	Sweden	Norway
Teachers	2	1	3	4	1	6
Students	2	3	4	7	1	26



Scary Trolls



Funny Tusses

The Study: Perspective, Research Question and Methods

The overall aim of this study was to explore, challenge and question our own understanding of how to devise artistic projects with mixed subjects and cultural groups within teacher's education. To this end, we identified, described, discussed and critically investigated defined challenges in the production process. The study's artistic subjects included drama, music and visual art students.

This study examined the development of the artistic production as a case study, with the aim of studying the particularity and complexity of the interactions involved and the objective of ultimately coming to understand the activity within important circumstances (Stake, 1995, p. xi).

The main research question was: What particular challenges specific to the teacher role will be revealed as an international group of participants undertakes the development of an artistic interdisciplinary production using the devising strategy within a one-week timeframe?

The approach is qualitative, descriptive and ethnographic. We collected the data using several methods, including questionnaires that were handed out each day of the week. Based on earlier experiences and reflections from similar productions, we asked participants to describe their personal highlights, surprises, frustrations and learning outcomes. In a final evaluation form, the participants were asked to assess the overall experience of the intensive course. Initially, we were open to receiving descriptions of all kinds of experiences during the week.

We did not specifically ask about the teacher role. Five teachers and ten students from different countries and fields were challenged to comment on the working process in filmed interviews throughout the week. These comments were informative and incorporated into the research. Additionally, there were video recordings and field notes from workshops.

Literature Review

Within higher music education, research articles have been published on music education collaborations, collaborative making and learning, and international and cross-cultural collaboration (Burnard et al., 2009; Gaunt & Westerlund, 2013; Hebert & Saether, 2014; Mars, Saether & Folkestad, 2014). In visual arts, there are many examples of collaboration between artists and schools (Lawy et al., 2010). In drama, there has been research on the concept of devising (Oddey, 1997; Heddon & Milling, 2006; Govan, Nicholson & Normington, [2007] 2010; Haagensen, 2014). Research on projects specifically combining an interdisciplinary approach with collaborative and intercultural dimensions in an art production were difficult to find. However, one exception is Barber et al.'s (2007) study, 'Researching Collaborative Practice,' which explores the value and nature of collaborative relationships. One of their relevant conclusions was that the collaboration took a great deal of time and commitment to negotiate across artistic mediums and cultures (Barber et al., 2007, p. 70).

Devising Strategy

When seeking to develop an interdisciplinary arts performance, there is an array of strategies to choose from. This project used the *devising* strategy, which over the decades has been widely-used by many theatre companies and universities across Europe, the US and Australia (Heddon & Milling, 2006, pp. 1-2; Govan, Nicholson & Normington, [2007] 2010, p. 4).

The *devising* strategy originates from northern Europe and North America in the 1960s and early 1970s, when the term emerged as part of the growing group movement emphasising communal and democratic work (Braanaas, [1985] 2008, pp. 131-132). During the time, there was a need and desire among theatre companies for alternative ways of creating theatrical performances.

Devised work is a response and a reaction to the playwright-director relationship, to text-based theatre, and to naturalism, and challenges the prevailing ideology of one person's text under another person's direction. Devised theatre is concerned with the collective creation of art (not the single vision of the playwright), and it is here that the emphasis has shifted from the writer to the creative artist. (Oddey, 1997, p. 4)

This way of making theatre is an alternative to the dominant literary theatre tradition, which is the conventionally accepted form of theatre. According to Oddey, traditional theatre has been dominated by a patriarchal hierarchical relationship of playwright and director:

This dominant tradition revolves around and focuses on the interpretation of the playwright's text by a director, culminating in a performance which is realized through a production process (within a prescribed period of time and means) in a theatre building. (Oddey, 1997, p. 4)

The concept of devising strategy work implies a process wherein the participants 'collaboratively investigate a material/a pretext and from that create new material, both text, music and in other ways. The performative material is made through improvisation, testing, turning back to the project's starting point and so on' (Heggstad, 2013, p. 40, authors' translation). Furthermore, Ørvig (2013) states, 'In such projects the "platform" is unsteady, and every time it seems to fasten and stabilize, it will once more move and take a new direction' (p. 55, authors' translation).

And yet, it is the very existence of this shifting path that makes devised work so demanding, risky and exciting. As the devised process develops, this path must settle and aspire to some sort of aesthetic coherence (Bicât & Baldwin, 2002, p. 7). Although devising is a collective and (seemingly) democratic way of working,

It is likely that some 'parts', for instance material, texts or director is given more authority. [...] What keeps the process open, and what and who proposes a closing of the process? [...] For whom and in what way is the theatre process meaningful? (Rasmussen, 2013, p. 35, authors' translation)

In recent years, the separation between devised strategy and script has become less apparent. Today, script is occasionally used as a starting point (Heddon & Milling, 2006, p. 3). In his book *Group genius – The creative power of collaboration*, Sawyer (2007) claims that the idea of the lonely genius that creates breakthrough innovation in our world is a romantic myth. Usually, such innovations are results of group collaboration. Sawyer said, 'It's group genius that generates breakthrough innovation' (Sawyer, 2007, p. 7). The key to innovation, according to Sawyer, is to achieve the perfect balance between planning, structure and improvisation. The leaders have to establish an improvisational approach with 'creative spaces' (Sawyer, 2007, p. 39).

In this improvisational approach, the act of listening is just as important as coming up with one's own ideas. People who listen closely give energy to their co-players, and they are often

the best players. Sawyer uses jazz bands as a metaphor for the ideal group collaboration. In a jazz band, everybody is invited to listen and adapt, as well as to improvise. Both are equally important in a jazz band. 'Trained improvisation actors listen for the new ideas that the other actors offer in their improvised lines, at the same time that they're coming up with their own ideas' (Sawyer, 2007, p. 14). Sawyer stresses the idea that one should not start with trying to understand the big picture; instead, one should start working with bits and pieces.

In improvisational innovation, teams start with details and then work up to the big picture. It's riskier and less efficient, but when a successful innovation emerges, it's often so surprising and imaginative that no single individual could have thought of it. (Sawyer, 2007, p. 17)

The Teacher as Facilitator

In a *devised* strategy, the teacher takes on the role of 'facilitator'. According to Hull (2006), facilitate means 'to make easy' (p. 25). The facilitator helps the group play and improvise together. According to Prendergast and Saxton, 'An applied drama facilitator should be the kind of person who enjoys people, is comfortable in new situations, can tolerate lots of change, can improvise in the moment as a response to change, is a deep listener, is a curious questioner and is able to "de-centre"; in other words, to see the work as about and coming from the participants rather than from him/herself' (Prendergast & Saxton, 2013, p. 5).

As a facilitator, one needs to read the process of the group at all times, noting the quality of responses from the group as one initiates any intervention. If, for example, the 'facilitator radar' is fully on in the music group, the music facilitator should be able to 'read subtle audio, visual and kinaesthetic responses that translate into the state of the group rhythmically, musically and emotionally' (Hull, 2006, p. 39). The facilitator interprets the situation of the improvisation process of the group and comes up with subtle solutions that bring the work forward.

In visual art, including scenography and costumes, the facilitator must have skills in sewing and designing and have a developed visual thinking. According to Tina Bicât, costumes for *devised* theatre cannot be designed and made in advance, but must be created as the work grows. Bicât states:

It is surprisingly easy to get hooked onto an inappropriate idea and, also surprisingly hard to unhook yourself, most particularly when there is not a script to give pathway for your thoughts. Ask questions, share your thoughts and above all listen, to catch the feeling and spirit of the idea, as well as the content. (Bicât

& Baldwin, 2002, p. 108)

There are several approaches within music education that emphasise composition through improvisation and interactive co-performance suitable within an overall devising approach; for instance, the improvisation methods within rhythmic music pedagogy, drum circle facilitation, soundscaping and soundpainting (Hauge & Christophersen, 2000; Hauge, 2014; Hull, 2007; Bakke, 1995; Thompson, 2014). What is common within these strategies is that one goes directly to the material and experiments and improvises on selected fragments or frames, rather than writing down or lining out the big picture beforehand. The music is composed by a group of cooperating participants through interactive improvisation strategies.

Findings

The answers given in the questionnaires provide information about the participants' experiences related to surprises, highlights, frustrations and learning outcomes. In analysing the answers, we identified one topic that runs through all or most of the data: views and statements related to the teacher role. Incorporating the interviews and field notes, we found that the participants held different views on both the teacher role and the concept of devising itself. To us, this was not a surprise, since the teacher role and the concept of devising are closely related. The differences in views on teacher role and devising were not aligned by subject or workshop, but by nationality and category of participant (student or teacher). In the following section, we will describe these differences and thereafter discuss them.

Don't We Have a Story Line? The Concept of Devising Put into Practice

All of the project groups implemented an improvisational approach; they went directly to the material, working on the details and using different working methods, and they all managed to come up with fruitful ideas on the first day of production work. However, some students expressed their frustrations in the questionnaires by the end of that first day. They missed having a storyline, or a plot as they called it. The question had already been raised at the first teachers' meeting: 'Don't we have a storyline, like we had with Voluspá in Iceland?'

As a result of this frustration, two Danish students independently created a plot sketch that first afternoon. After the common warm-up on the second day, the students presented their storyline. One of them commented afterwards:

There were thousands of balls in the air, and nobody was catching one, and they were just kind of beaten around, so we started to write a plot for building up a frame, just made a beginning, and you could imagine all the space in between the beginning and the end, and the red line was open for the students and teachers to

fill in with their music and drama and everything, but it kind of made people relax. I'm glad that there came anger so to say, and that we knew where we were going from and where we were going to.

The participants agreed to this storyline, and an Icelandic teacher commented on their initiative: 'I learned today that ideas and initiatives are emerging out of frustration. We are in a process.' Another Icelandic teacher wrote:

I was surprised when some of the Danish students presented an idea about the play in the morning the second day. I was afraid that this 'solo-act' could destroy the mood in the group – which the students would not experience that the creation was worked together of everyone. But it just happened for a very short time, and then the group worked beautifully out of that situation.

At the internal meeting between the three music groups, which occurred at the end of the first day, when the groups presented their ideas to each other, many group combinations were suggested. One idea was that the heavy vocal clusters of the Trolls could be given a more exciting rhythm if accompanied by the percussion group. The drama and dance group thus merged the two compositions for the Trolls into a nice African-derived dance groove. Something similar happened with regard to the music for the Elves. The vocal group was improvising in an Aeolic mode to get the right heavenly atmosphere, while the percussion group independently worked in a similar mode on xylophones and glockenspiel. With some adjustments, they came together and made spherical music for the Elves; one for the Elves to appear on stage and one for their ritual, rhythmical dancing in a circle. The mournful and spooky melody in Aeolic mode for Draugen was to be accompanied by sound effects made by the rock-band group together with the percussion group.

The drama and music groups worked independently the two first days before they met to coordinate. Many participants worried about this meeting – how could their ideas possibly fit together? A big surprise for many students was that the music composed by the three groups suited the ideas of the drama group so well. As an Icelandic student wrote, 'It surprised me how easy it was for the music and the drama to come together. It could have been a problem.' The costume group, after having been frustrated about not knowing the status of the other groups, decided to visit the music groups and the drama/dance group to discuss their ideas with them. When they agreed upon which fabrics to use and how the design should be, they easily produced costumes for the groups of wights. As the actors came to try on their outfits, they became very inspired and asked if they could use the costumes in their rehearsals, a synergetic effect which also influenced the costume group watching the rehearsal. Bicât writes:

In asking actors to participate in the design of their own costume, as you must do when you work devised, you are opening the door to hundreds of disconnecting ideas from different imaginations (...) There is a particular value in devising actors wearing their costumes for rehearsal. Actors cease to feel dressed up and begin to live in their costumes. (Bicât & Baldwin, 2002, pp. 113–115)

As the performance developed, costumes were adjusted, and visual effects were added and removed. They sometimes varied the shapes and textures in the costumes or used the same shape but in different colours. Some costumes were ready half an hour before the final performance, still wet from the splashing paint that had just been applied to the fabrics. The three Huldras had their flower wreaths and necklaces, made earlier that morning from branches, plants and fruits.

'I Wasn't Sure What to Do to Make Them Alive': The Teacher as a Facilitator

We expected the participants to express frustrations due to the different tutorial traditions prevalent in the six countries involved. In the Nordic countries, the democratic teaching methods applied in the devised strategy should have been familiar to the teachers. Whether this was the case in the Baltic, we did not know. Our study revealed differences in understanding regarding the teacher role among both the students and the Nordic teachers. On Thursday, under the 'today's frustration' item on the questionnaire, a Latvian visual arts teacher wrote, 'How difficult it is for teachers (me too) to let students be creative without authoritarian suggestions. It is so easy to show what to do.'

The Baltic participants did not say much more about frustrations that week. To our surprise, the biggest challenge came from within the Nordic group, and specifically among the Danish participants.

One Danish teacher was frustrated because we did not tell him whether this was a 'pedagogical' or an 'artistic' project. If it had been a pedagogical project, he said, it would be up to the students to decide, and if it was artistic, it should be up to the teacher to decide. The Danish group of teachers seemed somewhat uncertain of whether, how and when they should interfere in the creative process. They seemed to want the students to take the primary role but found it challenging to hold back from contributing their own knowledge and expertise, especially when it was obvious that the students lacked skills and experience. One Danish teacher wrote:

(It was) very difficult to know when to do what with whom. It is a dilemma as a teacher to be joining on equal terms with the students. Who can make the decisions,

and when? [...] Some of the students are confused about our role in the group because sometimes we have to take leadership to get a flow in the process. If we don't some students think it's odd.

Another Danish teacher expressed in the questionnaire her surprise that the students did not say much when she invited them to come up with ideas: 'I wasn't sure what to do to make them alive.'

A teacher from Estonia expressed in the interview that she was very happy to experience 'in real' the democratic way of teaching, and she expressed her surprise that group creativity could yield such great artistic results:

The surprise of the week was the power of group creativity. We found common ground and used our experience to work out the play. [...] These years when we were closed and occupied from Soviet Union we didn't have contact with the Nordic countries. [...] I do hope, with my background, that first of all they've (refer to her Estonian music students) learned a way to work all together, not something really new, but to see and experience that this is a way that our colleagues work, every student should bring their ideas, and I do hope that it does not finish here, because we would like that the students take all they get here to their environments and their homes and their colleagues and students – so it spreads.

Students Views on the Teacher Role

Many students, especially within the Icelandic and Norwegian groups, wanted the teachers to take more control than they did. However, the opposite was equally common, especially among the Danish students. In the final evaluation, one Danish student wrote:

I am surprised about how many times I just have been observing and 'accepting' the demanding teachers and just been a "following student" and I wish that the teachers had been much more in the background.

Another Danish student said in the interview:

In our heads teachers will always be more powerful and have more to say than we do. And that's sad, because it was a process for both the teachers and students.

There were clear cultural differences among the participating students' national groups. The Danish students seemed to expect to be heard and seen. They were the ones who most clearly expressed frustrations regarding the teacher role. 'Why should one person lead it all?' This student referred to our stage director, who had the challenging task of coordinating the group work into one complete performance. The same student another time suggested that a student

should be challenged to be the stage director, perhaps with a teacher as coach. A considerable part of the Icelandic and Norwegian groups, however, expressed that the observation of the stage director in action was one of the surprises or highlights of those two final days. Their frustrations mainly concerned certain Danish students who seemed to be eager to get their ideas through and lead. The plan was to form a directing group among the students that would cooperate with the stage director, but this was unsuccessful due to practical obstacles. This feedback led us to ask whether there may be a stronger tradition of performing democracy throughout discussions in education, both in Denmark in general and in teacher education in particular.

The students from the Baltic countries expressed fewer frustrations during the week according to the questionnaires. It is unclear whether this was the result of politeness, or whether they were merely pleased with the situation. Both students and teachers from the Baltic countries expressed that they enjoyed working in a 'democratic' way. An Estonian music student expressed the feeling of ownership with regard to the performance:

It is a total different feeling (a whole another feeling) to go on stage with the goal to create an atmosphere and build relationship with the audience, rather than just do what the teacher has told you to do.

Discussion: Why Can't the Teachers Let Go of Control?

How can a teacher be a democratic leader or facilitator, rather than a 'dominating' teacher? Does this imply that they have to 'let go of control,' as the student quoted in the heading asks, or be 'on equal terms with the students,' as the aforementioned Danish teacher describes? Why should an expert teacher within teacher education 'let go of control'? Can the teacher really be on 'equal terms' with the students?

The teacher role and the teaching style are common themes in previous studies. Researchers have concluded that creating art with young people, rather than teaching it to them, requires 'skilful navigation'. It is not only challenging but also difficult for the artists to support and develop the creative process 'without dictating the outcomes' (Lawy et al., 2010, p. 18).

Hebert and Saether (2014) commented on how difficult it is to change teaching styles:

The challenges of cooperating in a musical project where the participants have very different teaching styles are obvious. Even when participants have the best intentions, in practice it is often more complicated than anticipated to change deeply rooted attitudes and expectations regarding teaching and learning. (p. 432)

On the other hand, it is not impossible. In that same article, the authors described how an Ghanaian teacher and a Danish student learned to adapt to each other:

A student from Denmark describes the teaching of one of the Ghanaian musicians as both authoritative and “joking”. This was very different from the Danish, more student-centred approach to learning. [...] During the project period, the Danish student gradually learned to adapt to this more authoritative teaching style, while at the same time sharing his methods with the Ghanaian teacher. (Hebert & Saether, 2014, pp. 430-431)

We cannot give any clear directions as to how the teachers should interpret and perform their role as a democratic leader or facilitator in a workshop when it comes to devising strategy. It depends on the context, including the particular project, the topic, the teachers, the subject, the situation and the group of students. The teachers have to be situational leaders, not only mapping the situation, but also defining and implementing democratic strategies that can absorb unexpected challenges and dilemmas.

In retrospect, however, it is clear that there could have been a longer and more thorough discussion on the expectations of the teachers’ role, especially since concerns were expressed during the first teachers’ meeting. One teacher was worried that he would dominate the group work and thought it best to step out of the creative work, while we as leaders thought it necessary for teachers to contribute their expertise to facilitate the best possible learning experience for the students and ensure the artistic quality of the performance. We had confidence in the teachers as facilitators and felt certain that they would ‘pay attention to the social and emotional health of the group in addition to teaching necessary (...) skills’ (Prendergast & Saxton, 2009, p. 20).

I’ve Never Been in a Group with So Many People Having Opinions About So Many Things

Devising strategy is time-consuming. It also takes time to become comfortable with improvising if the concept is unfamiliar. Many students were worried about the outcome. Some Danish students questioned the time spent on ‘warming up activities’, including the one full day of inspirational activities, such as land art, lectures, concerts and theatre performance. Other participants, however, were happy about these activities and found them useful. One

Danish student expressed in an interview that the land art activity, in which they had to create habitats for the wights, was good because she was uncertain of how Norwegian Trolls behaved and lived. By seeing a theatre production by the professional ensemble Bergen Byspill that featured the same selection of wights on the first evening, the students were inspired and self-confident. They became confident that they could develop something similar, or even better.

As stated earlier, devising strategy implies uncertainty and shifting paths, seemingly without structure or coherence. As organisers, we have experiences with such processes. For those less experienced, devising processes may be challenging and seem like an unnecessary, difficult and time-consuming production process. Resistance may even develop among group members if the intentions are unclear, as with this project.

Research has shown that resistance may be fruitful in creative processes. According to John Dewey, 'Resistance accumulates energy; it institutes conservation until release and expansion ensue' (Dewey, [1934] 2005, p. 161). However, there may be a positive effect of resistance, according to Dewey:

What was mere shock becomes an invitation: resistance becomes something to be used in changing existing arrangements of matter; smooth facilities become agencies for executing an idea. (Dewey, [1934] 2005, p. 161)

The intent of choosing devising theory was to challenge the participants. As the stage director said in the interview:

For me it's going to be really interesting, fun, possibly frustrating to watch the students, the total group, when we start fusing things together on Thursday. I like to see when people get their feathers ruffled, what happens when people are starting to realize that they are not in their comfort zone, and how they deal with that challenge.

Pandit and Alderman (2004) observed how intercultural interventions in higher education can 'push students out of their comfort zone, creating an initial resistance or discomfort, but with a positive outcome at the end' (p. 134). Several students expressed feeling challenged by being on an unsteady platform, while others found the experience fruitful. As an Icelandic student expressed, 'I learned to come completely out of my comfort zone.'

Including 60 participants in the group was a challenge. The number of ideas expressed was sometimes enormous. The participants' attitudes varied when it came to patience in giving and receiving ideas from each other. The section heading refers to a quote by a Norwegian student, who described the week as an enormous creative research process. He thought there were too many voices and opinions, so he himself opted instead to listen.

As one Icelandic student concluded at the end of the week:

I really didn't know that we could do this so smoothly. You know – the music, the drama and everything. And the costumes were so great, and everything just came out to be greatness.

All the participants had been given the same preparation material and tasks, including the framework of the seven wights. Frames and structures are important for such a big group, but they do not necessarily have to include providing a story line. Luckily, the story line created by the two students was quite open, so it did not strangle creativity.

The Necessity of Coming Out of One's Comfort Zone

In devising strategy, one does not usually distinguish between pedagogic and artistic projects, as the aforementioned Danish teacher wanted us to do. In devising artistic projects, it is not a matter of 'either/or'. Both aspects, the pedagogic and the artistic, are included. The question of pedagogy versus art is important and fundamental within art teacher education, but such a discussion is outside the scope of this paper.

With democratic leadership in devising strategy, there will always be a tension. The challenge of the teacher to define or interpret and perform the facilitator role will always exist. He or she has to be a situational leader to be able to 'read' the complex situations that occur in the group and suggest actions. We think, however, that it might help to shed light on some of the challenges involved. For instance, the Baltic participants came from other teaching traditions. They were prepared to adapt to the more democratic way of teaching and learning. During the week, the teachers managed to modify their teaching styles. The Danish participants, on the

other hand, seemed to come from a more student-centred teaching tradition. The students expected to be leaders, and during the week, they found it frustrating to adapt to the actual situation. In the end, however, most of them expressed surprise at and satisfaction with the great result.

In the multicultural context of a joint international artistic production, one should never take anything for granted. One of the Danish teachers expressed in the final questionnaire that she would have liked the teachers to discuss more in advance and share examples of how to work 'during the week day by day, instead of leaving this open discussion where everybody had suggestions to how to do it'. She also stated that 'it is important that the students know in advance what kind of process this is, and that they have to adjust and be flexible and give space to all participants during the process.'

In hindsight, with or without a storyline, we could have shared more information beforehand on devising strategy. We could have prepared them for process work, the time pressure, adapting to the teacher as a facilitator and becoming accustomed to the leader role oneself, as well as for fruitful frustration and the value of resistance in the process. Information on the director's role and her competence and working method could also have been provided to alleviate concerns.

Even among neighbouring countries, there are cultural differences. In history, culture and teaching traditions, those differences should not be underestimated. It was interesting to see how cultural differences surfaced in our project, and how these differences led to challenges for both the teachers and the students. Even a small country like Norway faces internal cultural differences and challenges, including that of recent immigrants, refugees and the Sami population, and finding ways to work more wisely with these groups is a continuous challenge of teacher education. The arts can play an important role in bridging the cultural gap by inviting young people to work collaboratively to reach their creative potential. The importance of getting 'experiences beyond the home port', as Hebert and Saether (2014, p. 425) stress, or 'coming out of ones' comfort zone', as one Icelandic student expressed, is crucial.

Conclusion

The main research question of this study asked: What particular challenges specific to the teacher role will be revealed as an international group of participants undertakes the development of an artistic interdisciplinary production using the devising strategy within a one-week timeframe? This study reveals that the concept of devising strategy was a challenge in itself. There were several ways to interpret the concept, seemingly due to the variety of cultural and tutorial traditions. Devising strategy necessitates the ability to master being on an unsteady platform, not knowing exactly what is going to happen next. The teacher needs to be a facilitator that defines her or his role – or in other words, a situational leader that can handle the inevitable tensions.

Considering cultural differences, we expected that the Nordic countries had a similar understanding of the concept of devising. We were less certain, however, about Baltic teachers' perceptions. We were surprised to find that Baltic teachers and students seemed to enjoy the work and expressed few if any frustrations, whereas many of the Danish participants seemed to have difficulties adapting to an unfamiliar way of working.

Looking back, the public performance was ultimately surprisingly high-quality, considering the given constraints. The strategies selected in the production were satisfactory, and having a stage director was crucial. However, we understand now that we could have prepared both the students and teachers more for the challenges and dilemmas beforehand.

In addition to being an important part of art education, projects like this are examples of unique learning experiences, which are essential for teacher education. They show why the arts matter for developing different kinds of understanding, including intercultural skills, critical thinking, cooperation in complex tasks and democratic decision-making.

In this study, we have shed light on both the predicted and unpredicted challenges of using devised strategy in an intercultural art production as a part of teacher education. Hopefully, we

can inspire more research on similar programs to the end of developing more knowledge in the field. Perhaps it can also inspire others to develop, perform and analyse their own projects.

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About the Authors

Torunn Bakken Hauge is an associate professor in music at Bergen University College, Faculty of Education, Department of Music. Her fields of interest and research are music in teacher and early childhood education, international cooperation, music performance projects, interdisciplinary art projects, rhythmic music pedagogy, vocal education and conducting. She is the first author of a textbook on rhythmic music pedagogy widely used in the Scandinavian countries. Moreover, she is the leader of two international networks: Nordic Network for Music Education (NNME) and Teacher Education Network (TEN). Additionally she is a singer in a professional early music vocal quartet.

Anne Synnøve Paulsen is an assistant professor in visual art at Bergen University College, Faculty of Education, Department of Visual Art. Her fields of interest and research are visual art in teacher and early childhood education, international cooperation and interdisciplinary art projects. She has illustrated a children's book (watercolor) and a cultural traveler's guide (photographs), both published in Norway. In addition, she has created costumes for various performances.

Siv Ødemotland is an assistant professor in drama at Bergen University College, Faculty of Education, Department of Drama. Her fields of interest and research are drama in early childhood education, theatre for young children, international cooperation, cultural understanding, and interdisciplinary art projects. For many years, she has taught drama in early childhood education in China. Additionally she is an experienced storyteller and theatre performer for young children (1-6 years).

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