

40.4 Dissensuality and Affect in Education

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Abstract

This article is a contribution to arts-based approaches to education. It makes a proposition for pedagogy of dissensus, a pedagogy inspired by Jacques Rancière, that is informed by the characteristics of art that possibly enables transformations and de-territorialisations of the subject. The ongoing project *My stunning stream – Made with a little mischief* (2020–) combining art and running in a repetitive manner is used as a point of departure. The project is used to discuss how art-practice as a lived inquiry relying on dissensual and affective awareness can inform teaching. Important and visible parts of the project are films made about three times a week from the same spot by the sea. The article makes use of a / r / tography as an arts-based research methodology and thereby investigating the art practice from a first-person perspective. The article demonstrates the importance of embodying and living the concepts and the pedagogy one calls for.

Keywords

arts-based, pedagogy of dissensus, dissensuality, affect, a / r / tography

Introduction

Like many other nations across the world, Norway went into national lockdown in response to the global pandemic caused by the Coronavirus in March 2020. I had just returned from a work-related trip to the UK and was immediately put into homebased quarantine for ten days. When I got out of quarantine, I reconnected with a past interest and started running. Since that time, I have been running the same route from my home past a local beach and back home again, a journey of almost 30 minutes three times per week. At the mid-point I stop by the beach and make a short 30 seconds video on my mobile phone. I make sure that I stand on exactly the same spot each time. The films are then uploaded on *Padlet*, a digital platform for creating projects that can be shared with the public.

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The ongoing (and possibly never ending) art-project that I have entitled *My stunning stream – Made with a little mischief* (2020–) is part of my exploration of pedagogy of dissensus, a pedagogy informed by the characteristics of art that offers resistance, disrupts the normal order and enables transformations and de-territorialisations in the subject. In my art educational research (Skregelid 2016, 2020a, b, c, 2021 a, b) I keep on returning to the term dissensus first articulated by the French philosopher Jacques Rancière. Rancière (2009, 2010) sees art as dissensus, a rupture in what we can perceive with our senses. He also states that dissensus breaks with habitual forms of imagination and contributes to new ways of seeing, hearing and sensing. I find dissensus to be a productive concept for education, as it represents disruptions and resistance that can offer new possibilities for the subject to emerge, and for the subject to be able to see him or herself, others and the world differently. As the concept is closely connected to art, I find it relevant for arguing for art in education.

In March 2020, one could say that dissensus was realised in the form of COVID-19. This virus interrupted and reshaped human existence, but also it sketched a new topography of the possible, by the way we had to relate to ourselves, each-other and our surroundings. For me this disturbance initiated my reconnection to running, and led to the subsequent filming, proposals for art exhibitions, new research projects, academic papers and presentations of a number of texts, including the text now being read. It also led to me questioning to my calls for dissensus, a fundamental part of my research and PhD inquiry that proposes dissensus as necessary ruptures in education and life that leads to new ways of knowing. However, in this context I felt a need for the opposite. I wanted calmness, continuity and routine and the running seemed to provide this.

In this particular text I draw attention to the connections between dissensuality, from dissensus (Rancière 2009, 2010), and the notion of affect in the way it is understood by the Canadian philosopher and social theorist Brian Massumi (2015). These concepts frame the presentation and discussion of the running project, which is the first I occasion where I explore arts-based methodologies through a distinct practice research method of running and film making. More explicitly I draw on my roles as an artist, a researcher and a teacher and make use of a / r / tography (Irwin 2012; LeBlanc & Irwin 2019). This is combined with the concept of lived inquiry (Roussel et al. 2018) to allow an embodiment of the ideas I make use of, as well as critically investigate the pedagogy I now present and call for. By doing this I hope to demonstrate the relevance of the pedagogy of dissensus and inspire others to live the concepts they argue for. I hope to show the need for disruptions that create doubt and uncertainty, not only for pupils and students, but also for artists, researchers and teachers.

Dissensus, dissensuality and affect

In the following I introduce the concepts dissensuality and affect and make a short account of pedagogy of dissensus and describe how it appears in my previous research.

I begin with Rancière as his writings on art, politics and the spectator, which have been and remain a major part of my research. I have been inspired by Rancière's aesthetic regime of art (Rancière 2004) which is characterised by an 'aesthetic effect (...) an effect of dis-identification' (2009, 73). By sticking to his

principle of equality, Rancière believes that art is not only a matter of transmitting messages, making models of how to behave or learn how to understand art but also enables and sees art as encounters of and with 'a third thing' (Rancière 2009, 14), where contrasting readings and thus disagreements appear. Rancière makes use of the term dissensus to describe what he believes art is and equally, what art can do: 'What `dissensus` means is an organisation of the sensible where there is neither a reality concealed behind appearances nor a single regime of presentation and interpretation of the given imposing its obviousness on all' (Rancière 2009, 48).

The way art can interrupt our everyday lives, question the sensible, cause doubt and uncertainty and possibly enable us to disagree, is in my view very relevant for education. In my PhD (Skregelid 2016) I analysed young people's encounters with contemporary art in a school- and art museum to discuss the relations between dissensus and what I term 'events of subjectivation' (Skregelid 2020a, 163), that means new ways of seeing, hearing, sensing and acting in the world. From this material and with the support from amongst the Dutch educational theorist Gert Biesta (2006, 2010) and the British art educational researcher Dennis Atkinson (2011), I developed what I call the pedagogy of dissensus, informed by the dissensual characteristics of art. When dissensus is used as an educational approach the norms and regular ways of teaching are challenged, and possible disruptions of the expected are offered. Both teachers and students are taking risks. The process and uncertainty is to be welcomed. I state that the unforeseen knowledge that appears in such events is considered as more interesting and important than pre described learning outcomes that dictate what is to be done to reach a foregone conclusion. Equality and non-hierarchical dimensions of teaching are emphasised. The dissensuality and affects are given attention. Pedagogy of dissensus might lead to resistance and also changes in perceptions and attitudes, changes and transformations in the subject.

After finishing my PhD I have explored this pedagogy in different contexts ranging from a course in site related art in a contested space like Lesvos in Greece for both experienced and non-experienced artists (Skregelid 2020b), and directly integrated the approach in my teaching at the University of Agder. I worked with teacher students who I have exposed to art that has been regarded to be too controversial for school education work (Skregelid 2021a). Pedagogy of dissensus has also inspired the methodology I employ with my students when they work at Sørlandet Artmuseum. This has been ongoing from 2004 and I explore this specific context in an upcoming publication (Skregelid forthcoming). This perspective is currently also included in the ongoing research project *pARTiciPED*, and the workpackage *Lab for initiating dissensus and exploring the edges between art and education*. Pilot-studies, leading up to this project, have demonstrated the relevance of dissensus in education (Skregelid 2020b, 2021b).

The term 'dissensuality' is related to Rancière's dissensus, the rupture art can be and cause, and the possible disagreement encountering art can lead too. I argue for dissensuality to be important for art education as 'it unites the sensory, the resistance, the disagreement and also the passion' (Skregelid 2016, 298–9, my translation). For me dissensuality involves the body and the stimulation of the senses. As far as I am concerned Rancière does not himself use this notion, however in a Norwegian translation we see the use of the term 'dissensuell' in relation to dissensus (Rancière 2012, 105). Atkinson (2011, 75) writes in *Pedagogy Against the State* about 'dissensual art practices' as marginalised aesthetic practices that

challenge the norms. Without mentioning dissensus explicitly in that context, he refers to Rancière to say how contemporary art can disrupt and redistribute the sensible. In *Art, Disobedience and Ethics* Atkinson acknowledges that his call for art as disobedient and a pedagogy that is 'disobedient to established parameters of practice, practices of thinking, seeing, making and feeling' (Atkinson 2018, 1) could be called a 'dissensual pedagogy' (Atkinson 2018, 6).

I find affect to be closely related to dissensus and dissensuality. Affect is a form of relationship in which two parties mutually influence each other without this influence taking place consciously and intentionally. Affect is, according to Massumi (2015, 88), to affect and to be affected. Affects are like disruptions that can cause changes. Affects are intensities. British artist and theorist, Simon O'Sullivan (2001, 126), refers to Massumi when saying 'Affects are moments of *intensity*, a reaction in/on the body at the level of matter'. Affect is the intimate relation to other people or places, human and non-human, art and nature. It is about embodied experience and how the body responds to someone or something that cannot be controlled. Massumi (2015, 110) writes about affect: 'With intensified affect comes a stronger sense of embeddedness in a larger field of life – a heightened sense of belonging, with other people and other places'.

The relationship in question here is a relation between me, my body, my senses and the environment I encounter while running in the role of an artist, a researcher and a teacher. What occurs when running and filming is not intentional, and yet I have made a rigorous frame for the non-intentional to happen. The route is planned. I am running about every second day. I stop by the same spot. I film the same view. The duration of the film is the same. In this way a strict routine and rhythm is established and is framing the project. Despite all this, the affect the running and the filming has on me is not controllable.

Both the terms 'dissensuality' and 'affect' are relevant concepts to bring into my reflections on *My stunning stream – Made with a little mischief* as I bring my body into action and as I have become very aware of my responses to the movements I make and are affected by. They are also educational concepts as they represent possible transitions and changes. I return to this after presenting how the project was initiated.

COVID-19 as dissensus

On 12 March 2020 many Norwegians experienced the most intrusive restrictions and were affected by the words from our Prime Minister Erna Solberg. She stated: 'Dear all, it is a difficult time for Norway and for the world. Norway is being put to a great test. Both as society, but also, we as individuals. During this period, we will all have a different everyday life' (Solberg 2020). She then continued to talk about the dramatic lockdown, the limitations and lack of social interaction that was ahead of us with the closure of schools, universities, and borders. No visitors and no contact outside of our immediate circle.

My immediate response was to cycle to the local beach Bertes to look south. I felt I needed to breathe. Later in the evening the news declared that anyone who had been abroad, had to stay in quarantine for 10 days. As I had arrived from the UK on 8 March, I was in that category. The following days I felt uneasy and confused. It was really strange and surrealistic to hear about a total lockdown in Norway and in most other countries just a week after I had arrived crowded London.

The following days most of my attention was on the news. My eyes were on the screens, either my phone, my laptop or TV. I do not think I realised how serious this pandemic was until I saw my kids wanting to play with neighbours and even this had to be stopped. I wanted to visit my mum who lives close by, but the restrictions prevented me from doing so. I could not go into a shop or my office. My own life, and others' lives, were suddenly dominated by severe limitations.

By 19 March I was officially out of quarantine. The day after I started running a route I had been running before, but now with a pause at a halfway point. I found myself a spot to stand, looking out on the sea-view. I took my I phone out of my pocket and pressed the video button. The project *My stunning stream – Made with a little mischief* was hereby initiated. I chose the title *Padlet* suggested for me when uploading onto the platform. I found the title to be uncanny yet suitable. The running was the beginning of a new direction in my art educational research. I had not included anything so private as this before. No doubt COVID-19 contributed to this and the emotional and physiological upheaval it caused contributed to a realisation of dissensus.

I see the ongoing global pandemic as dissensus. The lockdown and restrictions created a need for a new rhythm, a new habit, a need for balance in the overwhelming feeling of not having control. The disturbance COVID-19 represented led to my running. The pandemic, as mentioned in the introduction, made me question my own calls for disruptions and uncertainty. I encountered the resistance I am myself arguing for. The pandemic made me doubt my own calls for pedagogy of dissensus, thus it affected my role as an educator. The arts-based approach to research made me not only realise this in a cognitive way. It also made me aware of the importance of embodying the concepts dissensuality and affect in my research. The habit of running and capturing glimpses of what I see and experience while running, has turned out to be my own space for being educated. The purpose for sharing my experiences with the running, filming and what led to it in this art educational context is not solely to motivate art educators and researchers to run (although I highly recommend that).



Figure 1

Lisbet Skregelid: Screenshot from: *My stunning stream – Made with a little mischief* (2020–) 20 March 2020

Rather, I hope to demonstrate the relevance of being disturbed and being exposed to educational ideas one proposes. In this case the corona virus as a major disruption led to a doubting that both confirmed my calls for dissensus, but the pandemic also disturbed my own educational ideas as I was in need of continuity. The running about every second day, and all the repeated actions I write about below provided this. Another important aspect with the project is the merging of the roles of the artist, researcher and teacher and the realisation of the saying 'Practise what you preach'.

Research and life entangled

The project is the first research-project where I make use of arts-based methodologies, or at least where I make these methods more explicit. I frame the project within a / r / tography which is an arts-based, practice-based research methodology, characterised by a bodily, sensory, relational and exploratory approach to research merging the roles of (A) the artist, (r) the researcher and (t) the teacher. The spaces between these roles indicate how these are interrelated and how they overlap, still acknowledging the uniqueness of these roles (Irwin 2012; Leblanc & Irwin 2019). The word also involves art and graphy, that means image and text, with the idea of these extending each other.

The Canadian art educational researchers Stephanie Springgay, Rita Irwin and Sylvia Wilson Kind (2005) find lived inquiry to be a common approach in a / r / tography and in a / r / tographic fieldwork. Rather than discovering something that already exists in the world and is waiting to be found, every movement and every action in a process adds something that becomes a new reality and that in turn gives rise to new questions. Living inquiry, or living practice, is related to action research and presupposes that researchers put themselves into the situation, rather than placing herself or himself outside it. It also requires a sharpened focus on affective and intimate bodily moods when encountering the fluid, uncertain and temporality of life. Living inquiry is an embodied encounter through textual and visual experiences and a 'performative site of reflection' (Springgay et al. 2005, 902). Relevant to my questioning of pedagogy of dissensus, they say: 'A / r / tographers re-represent their questions, practices, emergent understandings, and creative analytic texts as they integrate knowing, doing and making through aesthetic experiences' (Springgay et al. 2005, 903). Living inquiry refuses absolutes; rather it engages with a continual process of not knowing, of searching for meaning that is difficult and in tension. In relation to my calls for dissensus, I find it interesting that Springgay *et al.* write about loss, shift and rupture to be the foundational concepts or metonyms for a / r / tography. They say: 'Loss, shift and rupture create presence through absence, they become tactile, felt and seen' (Springgay et al. 2005, 898). They continue to stress the bodily relation in a / r / tography by saying: 'A / r / tography as such is a methodology of embodiment, never isolated in its activity but always engaged with the world' (Springgay et al. 2005, 899). To be engaged in a / r / tography means to inquire in the world through a process of artmaking and writing. This engagement with the world makes me consider Biesta's (2017a) writings on world-centred education. How this personal art project can be related to the world, and the consequences for education will be discussed in the final section of this article. I now explore the practice and actuality of running and filming, and

later discuss the relevance of calling it arts-based research while I investigate the consequences of connecting this to education.

The art of running?

I always make the same route. I start from my house which is on the outskirts of the centre of Kristiansand, a city in the south of Norway. We have a nearby forest that is used by many of the citizens as a place for recreation and sports. However, as I love the sea, I run south instead of north through an urban area. On my way I pass a range of different buildings: schools, private houses, sports centres, shops, a kindergarten and a petrol-station. These are recognisable sites that have become part of my memory but not part of the film.

Since March 2020 the route has been slightly changed due to obstacles in the way. The city policy of providing new buildings and homes closer to the city centre has affected my running route and made it longer.

The beach where I stop on my route is called Bertes, which is a wonderful recreation area with sandy beaches that are flanked by rocks. It has a harbour close by and the area is also a camping site during summer.

I have currently (September 2021) made approximately 190 films stored on *Padlet*. The films are visual fragments from the running, small parts of the project, as they only reveal one place I pass on my route. Still, they stand out as strong evidence and context for my running.

The films show the same seaview in different colours brought about by the changing light and seasonal transformations of nature. We sometimes see people, but more often we hear their talking or their actions like diving into the sea and swimming. Sometimes there are boats, planes or birds that come into the picture frame. Sometimes we only hear the sound of these. We see the water covered with ice during winter, and at other times very calm and tranquil. Sometimes the sea is immensely rough due to heavy wind.

The films do not reflect the affects and the connections between me and my body, apart from the sound of my breathing, and the slight moving of mobile phone. When I stop after running fast, it is harder to keep my mobile phone still as my body struggles to recover the oxygen, I need to calm my movements. Therefore, however static they might seem, the films are moving. The more out of breath I am, the harder it is to stand still. When I am exhausted my breathing is also more audible.

So how do I connect my running as described above to the concepts dissensuality and affect? As mentioned earlier, I find dissensuality to unite sensory passions with resistance. This ambivalence is very much present in the running. In one way my body tells me to run, but I am also aware of the possible pain. The affects the moving of my body and the surroundings cause are something I seek. I allow myself to become immersed in the activity. My bodily and sensuous presence, the affects and intensities my running cause make me feel connected to life, to people and to places. The route and the place where I stop is so much embodied in me.

Returning to the virus as a disruption, a major dissensus. COVID-19 has made me relate to my local surroundings in new ways. First of all, I have got to know myself better. I have realised my need for having a routine that is my time – my time for breathing. I have also got to know my bodily responses to different actions. Most importantly, the virus and its affects has made me doubt and



Figure 2

Lisbet Skregelid: Screenshot from: *My stunning stream – Made with a little mischief* (2020–)
5 October 2020



Figure 3

Lisbet Skregelid: Screenshot from: *My stunning stream – Made with a little mischief* (2020–)
2 February 2021

question my own calls for initiation of dissensus and ruptures in education. I have been put in what Biesta (2017a, 65) calls the difficult ‘middle ground’. By experiencing this resistance, I embody the pedagogy I call for, and according to Biesta I encounter the challenges, and thereby I encounter the world, that is the place where our existence as human beings takes place.

The educational relevance of dissensuality and affect

Educators and art educators, like myself, spend a lot of time ensuring the best possible education of others. But where are we educated ourselves? Where are our



Figure 4

Lisbet Skregelid: Screenshot from: *My stunning stream – Made with a little mischief* (2020–) 30 June 2020

ideas and practice challenged? Where do we encounter resistance, so we doubt our habits and norms? What contributes to transformations and new ways of thinking and doing? *My stunning stream – Made with a little mischief* has become one of my educational sites, just as much as I am educated by my own students and colleagues. It is a place where I encounter the world and where I become part of the world. It is a place where my worldview is tested and changed. It is a place where I feel an embodied need for continuity and predictability: a need for continuity realised by a major disruption.

I see both dissensuality and affect as educational concepts because they involve an interruption, a change, a 'shake', a transition from something to something else. This quote from Massumi touches upon the educational relevance of dissensual and affective awareness:

When you affect something, you are opening yourself up to being affected in turn, and in a slightly different way than you might have been the moment before. You have made a transition, however slight. You have stepped over a threshold. Affect is this passing of a threshold, seen from the point of view of the change in capacity. (Massumi 2015, 110–11)

In my previous research I have investigated how disturbance makes events of subjectivation possible, by studying how students respond to unconventional teaching or disturbing art, introduced by the teacher or museum educator. I have discussed the connections between dissensus and events of subjectivation from an outsider perspective. This time I am joining the roles of the artist, researcher and teacher, and runner (!) and thereby I study this from a first-person, lived perspective. I also study the consequences from a disturbance, a world-spanning pandemic, that nobody was in control of, and as such out of the hands of the educator. Saying this, I acknowledge the paradox of teaching as dissensus as pointed out by Biesta (2017b, 83) when he asks: is teaching as dissensus 'asking the impossible?'. I believe however, like him, that teaching always involves a risk and elements of

what cannot be foreseen. So how can we then include such elements in regular teaching? This I have tried to describe in former writings (Skregelid 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2021a, 2021b). I will also explore it in my upcoming publications (Skregelid forthcoming).

This project both confirms my belief in the need for a pedagogy of dissensus, and the need for introducing disruptions in order to rearrange and transform regular forms of practice and habitual ways of living. But the project has also made me realise the need for routine and calmness, and the personal spaces that let you affect and be affected. When I run, I encounter the limits of my body. I feel discomfort and pain. As I am my own master, I can balance the discomfort by slowing down so the distress can eventually be turned into comfort. This makes me realise the importance of making spaces for students to encounter challenges and find their own ways to deal with them.

Most importantly, I will say that I have a much more personal approach to the questions and concepts that occupy me. My own calls for dissensus in education have been put in question, stretched and extended. The corona-situation has made me rethink and question my own theoretical arguments.

As mentioned before, I have found inspiration in Biesta's arguing for education that interrupts and disturbs. He calls for education to deal with existential matters, that means, education that is possibly confronting and difficult. Lately he has introduced the concept world-centredness and a world-centred approach to education and calls this *real* educational work: 'The real educational work, as I will argue, is precisely not about facilitating expression but about bringing children and young people into dialogue with the world' (Biesta 2017a, 37). By bringing myself into the difficult middle-ground, with help from a global pandemic, I have also encountered the resistance I am myself promoting. All of me has been affected by this, as I start doubting. I feel vulnerable and fragile. Neither human beings nor theories are solid and static. However, more than weakening my arguments I think the project demonstrates the importance of being radically disturbed. Disturbance leads to doubting. Like the Irish artist-educator and activist John Johnston, I see doubt as 'a pedagogical force' (Johnston 2018, 13). The running and quest for routine is confronting my theories in a very physical and embodied way. I agree with Johnston and Biesta and find the doubting and being in the middle-ground to be of vital importance in education. Therefore, I think we as educators should allow ourselves to dwell on the uncertainty and maybe the uncomfortableness the hesitation causes and remember this when teaching.

I could of course just run, and not make all the fuss of bringing my research together with my life. Still, I believe the arts-based research is at the core of my activity – this alone has made me run and has committed me to continue running.

I believe like many others that art makes us see ourselves and our surroundings in new ways. Art interrupts our lives and makes transformations possible. Springgay et al. 2005, 903) recognise the power of art to transform. O'Sullivan also talks about the transformative potential of art and how art is concerned with being:

Art, then, might be understood as the name for a function: a magical, an aesthetic, function of transformation. Art is less involved in making sense of the world and more involved in exploring the possibilities of being, of becoming, in the world. Less involved in knowledge and more involved in experience, in pushing forward the boundaries of what can be experienced. Finally, less involved in shielding us from

death, but indeed precisely involved in actualizing the possibilities of life. (O'Sullivan 2001, 130)

I think *My stunning stream – Made with a little mischief* resonates with what is said here. I also think the possible change art can lead to is relevant for research and education. We need to be challenged in our beliefs and understandings. Inspired by the concluding words in 'Autonomy of affect' by Massumi (1995), I let these words end this article: 'These facts about dissensus, dissensuality and affect – need to be taken seriously into account in educational theory. Don't forget.'

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