

## PLUNGED INTO DANCE

# Creating choreographic-pedagogic propositions as a collaborative learning community in primary school

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### Abstract

With this practice-based study we inquire into choreographic-pedagogic intertwinements and research methodological perspectives as a cooperative learning community between a choreographer-researcher-teacher and four primary school teachers. We have co-created the article from our experiences with a creative dance project with the third graders in a public primary school in Norway. Through exploring three stop-moments we tap into an artistic and textual diffractive analysis. The study is created through the expanded notion of choreography and carried out as performative research situated in the theoretical landscape of agential realism. With this study we challenge the gap between arts and school, the professional practices of teachers and artists, and the professional competencies and differences of the artist and of the teacher becoming performative in the dance project.

**Keywords:** expanded choreography – dance – education – diffraction – a/r/tography – learning communities

## Introduction

This article builds on a dance project with three classes of 8- to 9-year-old third graders in a public elementary school in an urban area in Norway. The dance project comprised part of the interdisciplinary Bird project initiated and carried out by the school's music teacher. Over a semester the third graders worked on the theme of birds in several subjects, as well as through workshops in dance, music and visual arts. In these workshops the children and teachers met professional artists who shared their artistic practice within the pedagogical frame of the school.

I (Mari) got involved in the Bird project as a choreographer-researcher-teacher (Le Blanc & Irwin, 2019) when I contacted the school, proposing to cooperate on a dance project as a part of my PhD research project. In the research project I am interested in inquiring into choreographic approaches to dance education and how to create collaborative learning communities between artists and teachers in elementary school through dance. The interest of the school and myself coincided in seeking school-artist partnerships. After meeting with the school management and the music teacher to present my research project the school invited me to participate with a series of dance workshops as a part of the Bird project. Here, I met and cooperated with Tine, Maren, Marianne and Kari, who were the elementary school teachers of the third grade in the school. The four of them had already worked together as a team for two years, and all of them had an interest in and former experiences of different arts forms such as dance, music and theatre, which were nurtured in the project (Holdhus et al., 2021). The five of us are the authors of this article, with myself as lead author. When we use "we" in this article, we refer to all of us. When we use "I", this refers to me as lead author and researcher (Mari).

In this article we inquire into both the methodological apparatus (Barad, 2007) that we created for this research, as well as choreographic-pedagogic perspectives in our learning community. The concept of apparatus, as we use it in this study, has grown out of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'body without organs' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2003), an unorganised system of experience and experimenting. Barad has further developed the concept of apparatus within the agential realist approach, diffracting the works of Bohr, Foucault and Butler (Barad, 2007). In light of both Deleuze and Guattari, and Barad's work on apparatuses, we understand the knowledge-making apparatus as an ensemble of discursive-material practices that enter into new combinations, which we experiment with and experience through in the study.

As a part of the methodological apparatus of our research we inquire into stop-moments (Fels & Belliveau, 2008) in order to expand and learn from them through our cooperation and through the research process. According to Fels, stop-moments are moments in a practice that "interrupt, disrupt, trouble, astonish" (2015, p. 478) as they make us stop and linger. In other words, we attend to our co-created practice, and pause at moments that somehow trouble or astonish us because something of special importance happens. We dive analytically into these stop moments.

As we dive into the stop-moments, we attune to felt intensities and affects (Massumi, 1995) in our bodies. Intensities and affect are also central in the Deleuzian and Guattarian apparatus (2003), and in this study intensities and affect also perform on us as part of the knowledge-making

apparatus. Affects refer to the felt intensities in our body: like, for example, the fast pounding heart that seems to jump out of your chest, or a rushing feeling of cold through your skin. McCormack (2013) reminds us that affect is “conceived of as a distributed and diffuse field of intensities, circulating within but also moving beyond and around bodies” (p. 3). The bodies together create “affective spaces” (p. 3), where the intensities and affects transform. Teaching can be understood as a powerful embodied experience (Østern, 2013), and we will later on describe in the three stop-moments how affect and intensities nurtured our actions and experiences in the workshops. Choosing to create the study through stop-moments, tuning into bodily felt experiences, is also a choice that allows us to engage with an embodied thinking, writing and creating, close to the research (Østern et al., 2021). The chosen stop-moments become a place to move from in order to expand our practice of researching, choreographing, and teaching dance. As post-qualitative researchers, we agree with St. Pierre (2021), who stresses the need for creating the methodological apparatus in post-qualitative research. How the methodology we create supports our inquiry we find important to explore. This has led us to formulate two analytical questions that run through this article:

*What choreographic-pedagogical insights are created through performative stop-moments in the emerging collaborative learning community between the choreographer-researcher-teacher and four primary school teachers in the Bird project? And, how does the chosen methodological apparatus support our inquiry?*

When talking about performativity we refer to von Hantelmann’s (2014) definition of the concept, where performativity is disconnected from representation, and rather linked with creation. von Hantelmann draws on the language philosopher Austin, who pointed out that “something that was said produced an effect beyond the realm of language.” (von Hantelmann 2014, unpaginated). In this sense, we understand performativity through asking what something can create for something. For example, what did the stop-moments from the dance project create for us as a learning community? Inquiring into what the stop-moments can do also vibrates with the concept of performativity as it is understood through the agential-realist approach (Barad, 2003) in which we position this study. Barad also draws on Austin, and also on the criticism made by philosophers Foucault and Butler of representationalism (2003). Barad argues that “language has been granted too much power” (2003, p. 801), and asks how other ways of perceiving, communicating, or being in the world can work performatively on us, just as we do in this article, when we later, for example, inquire into how dancing worked performatively on us during the project.

### **An agential realist approach, engaging in research and dance education through intra-action and diffraction**

The agential realist approach (Barad, 2007) is performing on the emergence of our analytical questions and this inquiry. In the agential realist approach Barad claims that everything is entangled (2007), disturbing the common linear and dualistic understanding of what causes what, where, and when (Juelskjær, 2019). For example, through the stop-moments we see that the classroom, the children, the theme of birds, dancing, we the teachers, time, desires, hopes, trust,

are all performing on what is happening in the stop-moment. These are all materialities, or bodies, that matter in the research process. Chappell writes about “embodied dialogue” (2018, p. 281), addressing the entanglement of these different human and non-human bodies performing on each other in the creative process.

The methodological apparatus is created through different materials and material-discursive practices (Barad, 2007) such as, for example, sensing through the skin. As the research is becoming-with the different human and non-human activities and materials in the dance project, we also touch on the ethical, or ethico-onto-epistemology (Barad, 2007). Being concerned with the entanglement between ethics, ontology, and epistemology directs our attention on to how we practice both arts-making, research and teaching. Barad talks about response-ability (2007), of both human and non-human matter. Despret writes that response-ability is the ability to respond, but also how matter (human and non-human) renders itself available to response (2004). To Barad, response-ability is of ethico-onto-epistemological matter, how entanglements intra-act with obligation to each other (2007). Or, as Bozalek & Zembylas write (2017, p. 68); “how entanglements are enacted – how and what we know, how and what we do in the context of what exists in the world which we are part of”. So, what does the material-discursive practices we engage in do? How do they allow for response-ability? For example, how we engage with teaching through the dancing body also questions the response-ability, or the ethics of the teaching and the dance as materiality and material-discursive practice. Materialities are thus entangled with discursive practices, and the pedagogical and methodological question of how we practice. The question does not limit itself to dance and pedagogy, but also relates to the methodological choices that we make. How do we create a methodological apparatus of response-ability?

The concept of intra-action (Barad, 2007) performs on how we understand relations to form and create throughout the project. Intra-action points towards how all the aspects of this study are interrelated, but also how we act from within: for example, how we in this study position ourselves as both research participants and researchers. This is expressed through how we consider the practices of choreographing, researching and teaching to become-with each other: they are entangled and perform on each other as well as on us practicing them as choreographing-researching-teaching. The analytical questions driving this inquiry are entangled, or performing on each other, intra-acting with each other and us writing this article, but also with the other human and non-human matter in the project, like for example the methodological apparatus. Through intra-action we perform agential cuts (Barad, 2007), “limiting but non-deterministic realisations” (Juelskjær, 2019, p. 181, our translation), that create the phenomena that we are inquiring into. And through intra-action and agential cuts, we are a part of and also creating the phenomena we are inquiring into. So, when we are attuning to, for example, intensities and affects (Massumi, 1995) in order to create research material, this attunement constitutes an agential cut. As such, the methodological apparatus allows for the creation of certain cuts. The cuts that we are making in this article are both of methodological and dance pedagogic matter, and we are concerned with how the different layers of the inquiry intra-act and diffract with each other.

Diffraction is originally a physical phenomenon describing when waves encounter an obstacle,

making them split into new and different waves. In the agential realist approach (Barad, 2007) diffraction expands into concerning knowledge-making (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017), emphasising how differences can be made, and also emphasising the value of differences that make a difference. One example is how we later on in the article propose to diffract choreography and pedagogy through each other. Or, how we use the concept of diffraction as a framework for the analysis (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017; Lenz Taguchi, 2012), diffracting three chosen stop-moments through image and text. In fact, diffraction makes us think of our research consisting of different layers: For example, the methodological layer and the pedagogical layers, or the ethical and choreographic layers. As we diffract through the three stop-moments we are in touch with these layers. As we perform agential cuts, we are relating, or cutting-together-apart (Barad, 2007) the layers into different constellations, depending on the cut.

We also consider knowledge to be created through the diffraction of several bodily practices of 'knowledging' (our expression): for example, through sensing, dancing, image-making, thinking, talking. These are different material-discursive-practices (Barad, 2003, 2007; Lenz Taguchi, 2012), where the material of this research is created from and through the cutting-together-apart our own bodies and other bodies, both human and non-human, that we encounter.

Continuing on these lines, we also think of the reader when writing this text. As our research is carried out through a transcorporeal (Lenz Taguchi, 2012) apparatus, our ambition is to create a transcorporeal reading, where the close-to-practice descriptions from the workshops and image choreographies that we propose in the analysis of the three stop-moments invite the reader to engage with us through different material-discursive-practices: through diffracting words and image, theory and practice, as well as movement and moments of stopping and dwelling

### **Choreography as a pedagogical and methodological approach**

The expanded notion of choreography (Foster, 2010; Klien & Valk, 2007; Lepecki, 2006) works performatively as we are creating the research and takes part of the methodological apparatus. We are interested in inquiring into how choreography works performatively on how we relate, act, do, think, move and create, both through the dance project in the school and also through research methodology.

Associated with dance notation in 1700, the concept of choreography has since then been stretched and bent (Foster, 2010). With the post-modernist wave in the 1960's, choreography started to orientate towards a "pedagogy of composition" (Foster, 2010, p. 36), emphasising the process of choreographing and also separating choreography and dance. When we talk about an expanded notion of choreography, we then think of choreography as a practice of creating movement or making movement emerge (Klien & Valk, 2007) in any context, not only through dance.

This opens possibilities for creating, thinking, writing, or acting choreographically in a broader sense, and also imagining intertwinements between choreography and other fields of practice and knowledge. For example, thinking and doing through choreography in the dance project with the

children opens up for creating choreographic and pedagogic intertwinements. Or, thinking with choreography as a part of the methodological apparatus is performative for how we choreograph the research project. For example, we imagine the methodological apparatus as choreographed, as an apparatus creating movement, relations and phenomena: an apparatus response-able to the materialities and bodies that intra-act with/in the research project.

Connecting to pedagogy, for Juelskjær pedagogy is “a worlding practice as it facilitates diverse ways of relating, thinking, sensing, acting” (2020, p. 52). To us, these practices are also close to choreography and research. Østern elaborates on the closeness between pedagogic approaches for learning and teaching and choreography as they both inquire into “the relationship between meaning-making, learning and teaching” (Østern, 2018b, p. 26). Østern proposes that the intertwinement between pedagogy and choreography creates performative cracks, or in-between spaces, that allow for movement, dynamic relations, complexity and transformation (Østern, 2018a, 2018b). Østern also refers to Joy (2014, in Østern 2016, p. 120) when she says that “to engage choreographically involves placing oneself in relation to someone giving impulses, waiting, listening and participating in a deepened state of attention” (my translation). To us, this is a way of creating space for response-ability.

When we think with choreography, the in-between spaces or gaps between choreography, research and teaching become possibilities for entanglements. We do not believe that choreography, research and teaching are the same, but they do entangle, connect or cut-together-apart in ways that are dynamic and nomadic. It is a choreographic choice to think of what we are doing as choreographing-researching-teaching, because when we do, these practices perform on each other and create movement and relations in our research project. For example, this has led us to understand dancing both as matter and a material-discursive practice through which choreographing-researching-teaching is becoming-with.

For us, this opens a new set of possibilities both in the dance project and also as we develop the research.

#### *Rhizomatic power relations in education and research*

We are influenced by the philosophical concept of rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 2003), where the flat structure of the rhizome erases potential hierarchies of the entanglements. To us, this means that children, grown-ups, arts, education, theory, and practices are viewed as non-hierarchical and entangled phenomena of our study, each and every one of them potent in working performatively on each other. We are aware of, and do believe that different power relations exist in the stop-moments that we will later describe, and in the methodological choices we have taken in creating the inquiry. One example is the power that I am handling as a professional artist visiting the school. Another example is again how we have chosen to build the methodological apparatus around transcorporeal (Lenz Taguchi, 2012) research material, giving power to material-discursive practices (Barad, 2007) performing on the fieldwork of the body. As researchers, artists, and educators we acknowledge the position of power that we inhabit, and here the shifting and dynamic structure of the rhizome allows us to critically manoeuvre through the different power

relations that are created in our project.

In the introduction we have tapped into the agential realist approach and the expanded notion of choreography and how it is put into play in this inquiry. We will now carry on to give an overview of the cultural and research context as well as to describe how the project was created between us. After giving insight into how we have created the analysis, we continue with an analysis of the three stop-moments. In the final part of the article, we engage in a discussion.

## **Cultural context and a review of the current field of research**

### *Cultural context*

In Norway dance is written into the national educational programmes for public elementary school as a part of the subjects of music and physical education (Norwegian Directorate for Education & Training, 2020a, 2020b). The schools are supposed to offer the pupils qualified aesthetic teaching and learning in and through arts subjects as a part of the everyday in class activities (Norwegian directorate for Education and Training, 2017). Due to the downgrading of arts subjects in Norwegian teacher education over the last 30 years (NOU 2013:4), there is a lack of qualified teachers in the arts subjects (Breivik & Christophersen, 2013b; Ministry of Education and Research, 2019). Nevertheless, children in public elementary school do encounter arts in the context of school through the Cultural Rucksack (from now on referred to as DKS). DKS, as a governmental funded national programme, distributes arts experiences to the schools, for example through performances or workshops. However, the programme is not supposed to substitute arts subjects and activities in the schools in class activities (Christophersen, 2013b; Hafnor, 2019).

The new national educational curriculum for public schools in Norway (Ministry of Education & Research, 2020) also challenges the way arts subjects are taught in school (Holdhus et al., 2021). When we read the new curriculum, we see a shift from master-pupil based teaching methods in the arts and aesthetic subjects, towards collaborative, interdisciplinary and creative processes. Our understanding is that the shift changes the focus from being concerned with teaching the arts to facilitating for creation through the arts. The teachers are thus the facilitators of arts creation in school. As we see it, the ambitions of the curriculum are opening possibilities for the children and the teachers to engage in artistic processes. But what kind of methods and knowledge are required for facilitating such activities?

We find that there is a gap between the current situation of the arts subjects in the schools (and in teacher education) and the ambitions of the new national curriculum. Our research project seeks to bridge this situation, and to explore and to strengthen in-class arts activities in collaboration between teachers and artists.

### *Research context*

There are numerous studies that inquire into the possibilities and challenges for artists visiting schools and artist/teacher co-operation in a Norwegian cultural context (Borgen & Brandt, 2006;

Breivik & Christophersen, 2013a; Holdhus, 2015; Holdhus et al., 2021; Lossius, 2015). The teachers find the DKS artist visits as positive and as a source of inspiration and knowledge that they can learn from (Christophersen, 2013b). However, they express that the artists are the premise makers for these visits. The teachers themselves do not experience (nor do they expect) having any influence on or participation in creating the artistic content. The teachers ask why their knowledge of their pupils, classroom leadership skills and relational skills are not embraced as a resource by the artists during the DKS visits?

There are also international studies that highlight how artist-teacher cooperation can cause a dichotomisation between teachers and artists (Chappell et al., 2009; Hall et al., 2007; Snook & Buck, 2014), or between school and arts (Holdhus et al., 2021; Wolf, 2008). Wolf (2008) highlights that the focus in collaborative teacher-artist projects is often directed towards what the teachers acquire from the collaboration. But what about the artists: do they learn anything? Through the Dance Partners for Creativity (DPC) project (Chappell et al., 2011), researchers, dance artists and school teachers inquired into creative partnerships and possibilities for developing such a practice. According to the authors, “through humanising, collective, democratic, multi-voiced activity, successful DPC partnerships were able to nurture ownership, difference and dialogue, and quality; and so nourish professional wisdom, communal cohesion, embodiment and generative possibility” (2011, p. 153). The latter resonates with our experiences throughout the dance project. However, we found that it was important for us to explicitly verbalize what we learned from each other. And that becoming aware of each other’s learning process was important to establish shared ownership of the project. Also, confronted with the busy and intense everyday school life, we found that a commitment to dialogue was challenging. We stress the importance of negotiating space for the creative process, also outside of the in-class activities.

We have reviewed several research contributions on creative dance projects in elementary school (Anttila 2003; Anttila et al. 2017; Juslin 2020) which highlight the benefit and interdisciplinary possibilities of creative dance as a part of in-class activities in schools. Concerning choreography as a pedagogic approach, we found studies that analyse the choreographers’ teaching approaches in the process of rehearsing and creating choreography with pupils in school (Messina, 2017, 2019; Messina and Motais Louvel, 2019). These studies highlight how the choreographer works between choreography and pedagogy in the process of creation. Two studies offer perspectives on the relation between pedagogy and the expanded notion of choreography (Østern, 2018b; Østern et al., 2019). Some also discuss teaching and learning methods for dance projects in an educational context (Sortland & Gudbrandsen, 2021; Østern et al., 2019; Østern & Strømme, 2014).

The cultural and research context of this study has given us an insight into the complexity of bringing arts and school together, as well as the benefits of interdisciplinary co-operation between teachers and artists in school. The research shows that tensions easily arise in the relation between teachers and artists (Chappell et al., 2009), but that positive creative partnerships have a strong potential for creating valuable knowledge in the field of arts and education (Chappell et al., 2011). Thus, inquiring into the professional learning community between teachers and artists is valuable in itself. Even though there are projects where teachers, artists and researchers inquire

into partnerships together, we find that there is a need for more research that investigates these challenges on a practice-based level: research created from within the practice itself, by teachers and artists.

### **Creating the structure and carrying out the dance project as a team**

The dance project comprised four major activities: preparation meetings, a preparatory workshop with the teachers, four workshops with each class, and attending the dance performance BLUEbird (my translation) with the dance company Dybwikdans. The idea of the preparatory workshop with the teachers was to give us as a team the possibility to tune into the artistic and pedagogic material through a lived engagement with the same dance material and creative ideas and tasks that the pupils would encounter later. In addition, it gave us an opportunity to prepare the project together (Holdhus et al., 2021) through mutual discussions. We also met for debriefing sessions in between the workshops. In these debriefings we brought different perspectives to a collective discussion which made the sessions into important moments of learning for us as a team (Chappell et al., 2011). It was agreed between us that I would have the responsibility to plan and prepare the workshops. I did this by leaning on previous experiences and my own research on my practice as a dance artist in public schools (Flønes, 2019), as well as my own experiences from the workshops with the children and the suggestions from the teachers in the debriefing sessions.

The workshops with the children followed (more or less) the same structure throughout the project. I started the workshops with performing a dance in the classroom, followed by a short group conversation about my dance and the theme of the session. We continued with creative dance exploration tasks that had a different focus in each workshop. One focus could, for example, be working on opposite qualities in the movements, like sharp or flowing. Another focus could be on different possibilities to move through the space, for example by rolling, jumping, or floating. The exploration was prolonged into a composition part, where the children either worked alone or in pairs to create small dances after a task given by me. A task could be to create three different bird movements that composed a dance, and then working on enhancing the qualities that characterised every movement. One class also worked with composing their own fantasy bird collage, using paper cut outs of animals and composing them together on a sheet of paper. At the end of each class the children shared their dance compositions with the rest of the class. If there was time left, we ended the workshop with a round-up conversation where we talked about the session.

During the whole project a professional film photographer filmed all the workshops. We used the video material to create small films from the process that were shared with the classes and their parents after the project.

**Figures 1-2:** Moments from the dance project. Photo: Elisabeth Røvnær/Screen Story.



### **An agential realist approach to analysis**

The article is constructed and created from the research material collected from the dance project. The different sources are transcribed conversations between the team, both process debriefings that we conducted regularly after each workshop, and conversations from the preparatory workshop and the evaluation session post-project. These conversations became a

place of learning (Chappell et al., 2011) for us, as well creating material for the research process. Additionally, as a “journey mapping” (Chappell et al., 2011, p. 20) we have used video documentation, log writings (Mari), and embodied memories from the process. Following an agential realist approach, we do not hierarchise any of the research materials, but rather explore how they perform on us through the different stop-moments. Here, through performative inquiry we have allowed ourselves to attune to the body, listening to the response-ability activated between bodies and materials and practices in the chosen stop-moments. From this material we have chosen three stop-moments: moments that we felt vibrated in the common discussions and in the workshops - meaning that they accumulated enthusiasm and wonder. These stop-moments can also be understood as pivot points in the project.

As Chappell (2022) writes, and as we have pointed out earlier, there is not necessarily a gap between research and pedagogy. And as Østern suggests (2018), there is not necessarily a gap between choreography and pedagogy. And if there is a gap, it is a performative one (Østern, 2018b): a liminal space or a threshold into something different or new. As the research process moves on, the methodological apparatus that we have created allows us to learn and transform with the process. It allows us to create through and with choreography, research and dance education, and to create choreography, research, and dance education. To us, this is a choreographic-researching-pedagogical movement.

#### *Two lines of analysis, working towards a transcorporeal reading*

From the research material we have created an analysing approach consisting of two lines of analysis diffracting through each other. One line is artistic practice created from freezing images from the video documentation. These images, or renderings, from the process (Cutcher & Irwin, 2017) are made into photographic choreographies, or stop-moments. The photographic choreographies are intertwined as a series (Marin & Roldan, 2010) as they occur through the text, playing with form, movement, directions in space, volume, and narratives. The second line of analysis we understand as textual practice. Here, we have rendered the analysis through close-to-practice descriptions. As lines, the two practices of analysis are always entangled as material-discursive-entanglements.

### **Analysis through stop-moments**

In the following we create and analyse three stop-moments from the dance project that we have experienced as being performative in the process. The stop-moments occur in chronological order as they took place during the period of time I was visiting the school with the Bird project. Through the stop-moments, we seek to explore and answer our analytical question: *What choreographic-pedagogical insights are created through performative stop-moments in the emerging collaborative learning community between the choreographer-researcher-teacher and four primary school teachers in the Bird project?*

Following the three stop-moments, we tap into to the methodological perspectives, exploring the question: *And, how does the chosen methodological apparatus support our inquiry?*

*Stop-moment 1: Performing a dance*

*“I am lying on the floor in the middle of the classroom. The desks and backpacks are pushed to the perimeters; the children and Maren are sitting in a circle around me. It is the first workshop together. I am starting my dance as if I was a baby bird slowly discovering the world. My eyes are closed, and with my movements I do small twitches in different parts of my body. As I move, my body is listening to the room and to the reactions from the children around me. Someone giggles or whispers to their classmate sitting next to them. I can hear whispers of excitement, or sense bodies crawling together. Maybe I dwell a bit longer, maybe I smile. I am enjoying the game of listening to what is happening in the room and unfolding the dance through the bodily diffraction with the children.” – Mari, narrative based on log writings, memories and the video documentation from the first workshop*

**Figure 3:** “Mari’s dance”. Photo: Elisabeth Rønvær/Screen Story. Image choreography: Mari Flønes



Presenting myself through a dance was something that I had tried out earlier in the context of school (Flønes, 2019). With the dance, I wanted to create an atmosphere, as well as giving the pupils an example of which kind of dance landscape we will enter. The dance in this way was

meant as a meaning-making practice (Juelskjær, 2020), bridging or intra-acting with the different aspects in the project, as well as expanding understanding of how the performance format can exist in the context of school (Sortland & Gudbrandsen, 2021). For example, the dance became a place where I could play and perform the metaphor of birds, and suggest to the children different ways of playing with the metaphor of birds, and in this way opening it up beyond flapping wings. I also danced for Maren, Marianne and Tine in the preparatory workshop a week before. They all responded that they thought the children would appreciate my dance. Tine was moved to tears. The dance seemed to engage her bodily and affectively (Østern, 2013), as if she was engaged in a transcorporeal reading of the dance. The feedback from the teachers made me think about how the dance performed choreographically on us (Klien & Valk, 2007), making relations between us, the project, and the children. The dance offered possibilities for response-ability: both for myself, and my ability to respond to and intra-act with what I sensed in the classroom, and also for the teachers and the children, and their ability to respond and in this way become co-creators of my dance.

Additionally, the classroom and the context of school intra-acted with my dance. We had pushed all desks and chairs to the perimeter of the room, forming a clean surface in the middle of the classroom. Somehow, the messiness; backpacks in all sorts of different colours, drawings and posters hanging on the walls, numbers, letters, and messages written on the blackboard, also informed my dance, as did the notion of time in school: a day divided into sections, jumping from one subject to the other, running out to play in the schoolyard, hurrying back inside again, waiting in line to wash our hands (remembering this was during the Covid-19 pandemic). I danced with concentrated and precise movements, focusing on combining my movements so as to give an impression of flow and fluidity. Dancing in the middle of what I experienced as the messy, hurried space of school, I wanted to create for the children and the teachers a possibility to be drawn into the dance, as a crack in the everyday life in school.

Dancing with the teachers in the preparative workshop also created a performative crack (Østern, 2018a, 2018b). Here we could share our thoughts about what the children could gain from this project. In the workshop I also invited the teachers to dance themselves. The affective space (McCormack, 2013) created by the dance, the dance I performed, and the teachers dancing themselves, tuned us together as a group as I experienced the teachers understanding through the dance the aesthetics and intentions that I wanted to get through to the pupils. As such, my performed dance and dancing together offered a space for response-ability between us and the dance project. The dance and dancing intra-acted with us, as much as it was a material-discursive practice that we intra-acted through. Sharing experiences from dancing also seemed to tear down the dichotomies between us as teachers and artist (Hall et al., 2007), because the contributions from each and every one of us nurtured the development of the project. My dance diffracted with the teachers' hopes and desires for their pupils (Christophersen, 2013b), making us come to a collective understanding of what the project could and should develop into. Through my dance, different layers of the dance project were cut-together-apart.

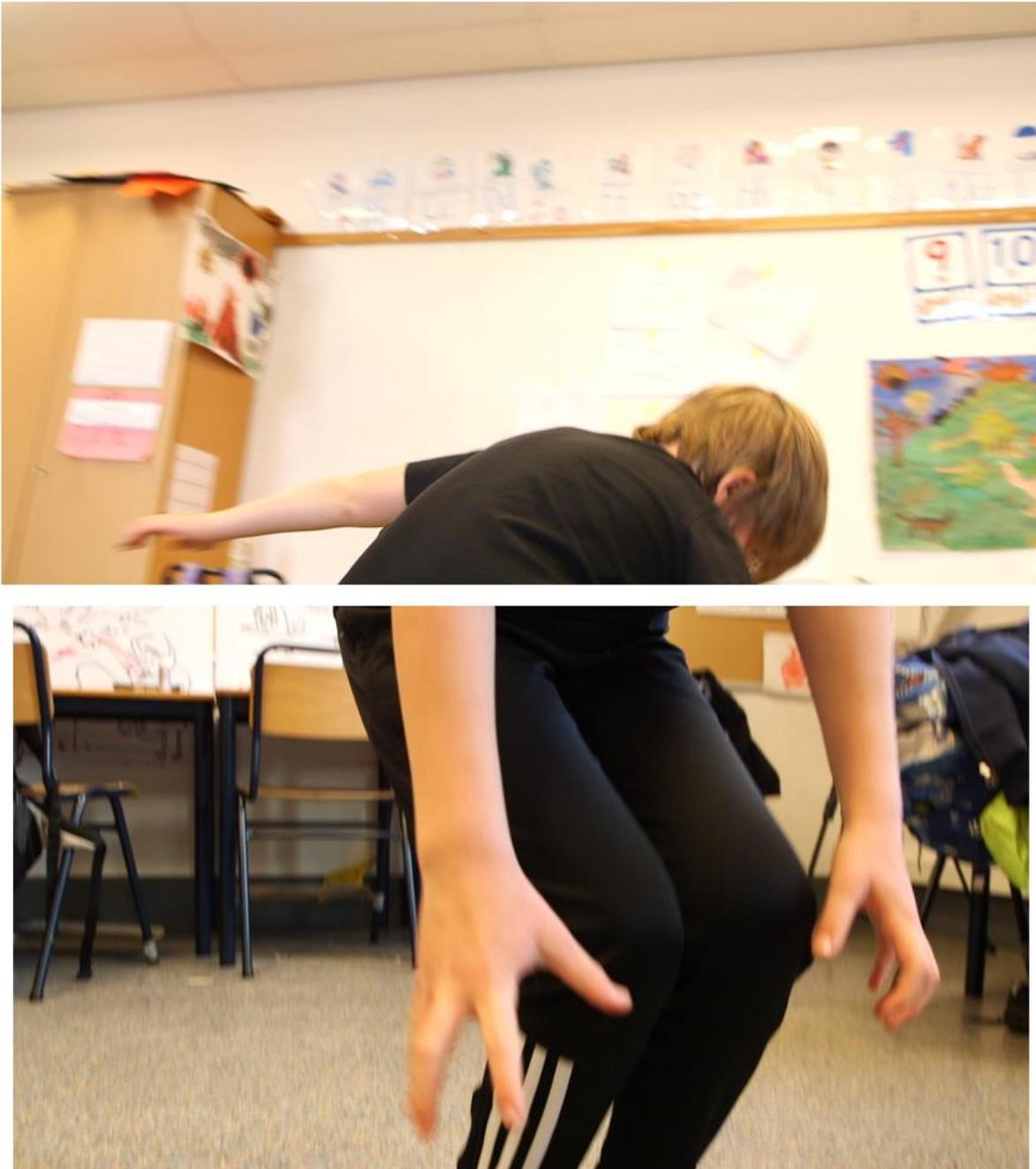
Fast forwarding: it is the debriefing after the first workshop with the children, and we are talking

about my dance and how it impacted on them. The feedback from the teachers touched on how the dance could perform in the project as an expanded choreographic tool for teaching and learning. According to them, the dance created both resistance and flow for the pupils, which created performative cracks (Østern, 2018b) in their presupposed ideas on dance. The teachers also highlighted how the dance engaged the children choreographically (Joy, 2014, in Østern, 2016) in various ways: giving an impulse for new movements, proposing a different way of communicating, evoking memories and ideas, or even becoming a possibility for focusing. We think that this example brings forth the potential of dance to expand into the educative context of school. The meeting between us, the participants in the dance project, and the dance as a transcorporeal material-discursive practice (Lenz-Taguchi, 2012) diffracted into different meanings and possibilities (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017). From thinking that I was dancing for the children and the teachers in the classroom, I now understand this stop-moment as an example of dancing *with* the children, with the teachers, with the classroom, and the school.

### *Stop-moment 2: The children dancing*

*“Ethan is floating through the space. His upper body is hunched forward, curved. His arms hang heavy to the side. His head hangs down, his eyes are focused towards something on the floor. He seems concentrated. He moves heavily and lightly at the same time on the boundaries of the floor. It is as if he is an old bird tired of his days. Or maybe he is expelled by the flock.” – Narrative based on the video documentation from the first workshop.*

**Figure 4:** “Ethan’s dance”. Photo Elisabeth Røvær/Screen Story. Image choreography Mari Flønes



An intensity of amazement or euphoria when watching the pupils’ dance was something that followed us, the grown-ups, throughout the project. Kari best described it as a “teacher’s drug”, a strong bodily arousal (Massumi, 2002) happening in her body. The intensity of euphoria interacted with us and our understanding of what was happening in the dance workshops. The teachers thought that the way the children danced revealed their capacity of courage and effort (Lossius, 2015). According to them, the children were moving beyond what they were used to, displaying another side of themselves to their fellow classmates. The dancing that we created in our project offered the children possibilities of agency. The strong bodily engagement (Østern, 2013) that we experienced we understand as a transcorporeal reading of the children’s dance, or as our response-ability to the children dancing.

We would also like to draw in expectations of what happens in school as an intra-acting agent connected to our euphoria. To us, the context of school and the classroom bring into the stop-moment expectations about what is supposed to happen in this space. The school and the classroom bring with them established practices, such as ways of acting, ways of being together, ways of moving. The children dancing, or our dance together, could be seen as performing on and disrupting with these established practices. In a sense, the children becoming-with dancing challenged our expectations, and our euphoria was our instant bodily response-ability to this happening.

We often used the phrase “being in it” when we talked about these moments of euphoria. At the time, we had a hard time explaining what “being in it” was, but in retrospect we would link this to intra-acting (Barad, 2007) and engaging choreographically (Joy, 2014, in Østern, 2016), where the dance entangling with the theme of birds seemed to create sense for the children through the dance. Actually, being in dance we understand as being-with the dance, in a sense creating it and following it as it unfolds in the dancers’ body and the space. We think that the choreography entangling the theme of birds, me performing my bird dance in the workshops, the co-teaching with the teachers (also heightened through they themselves having engaged with the theme of birds through dancing), the dance exploration tasks proposed, the pedagogic gestures made opened for the children’s response-ability to the theme of birds and to dancing, and sometimes allowed them to be in what seemed to us a concentrated and serious play through dance. To the teachers there was no doubt that the children were inspired by me (Holdhus et al., 2021), as they took on my way of being attentive to the dance in their own way of dancing. The dance that I danced led the children towards an embodied focus, rather than emphasising the shapes of the body. The importance of questioning how we dance in public school is connected with what the dance allows the children to access within themselves. The dance, as a part of the apparatus (Deleuze & Guattari, 2003; Barad, 2007) that we had set up for the workshops, was important for the sense-making both of the children and us adults. And through the active and dynamic dialogue between us in our learning community, these insights were brought to the surface.

### *Stop-moment 3: Dancing together*

*“The music starts, and I crunch down to a sitting position. Almost immediately, four of the children get up and join me on the floor. From being all alone, I suddenly feel a stream of movement around me, and the tender rush of the children’s dances makes me want to move slowly.” – Mari, narrative based on log writings, memories and the video documentation from the fourth workshop*

**Figure 5:** “Anton’s dance”. Photo: Elisabeth Rønvær/Screen Story. Image choreography: Mari Flønes



In the last workshop with the children I proposed an “open floor” improvisation. This is an improvisation where we dance together, and anyone can enter the floor to dance and exit whenever they want.

Since the classroom space was small, one additional task was trying not to have too many children dancing at the same time. This turned out to be a challenge, since the children dancing did not seem to want to leave the floor but stay in the dance together with me (Holdhus et al., 2021). The classroom space intra-acted with our dance and Tine found herself organizing the entrances and exits of the children in order for everybody to have a chance to dance. She did this through gentle gestures, sometimes whispering, which merely shows how she had come to perceive the dance as a work not to disturb (Christophersen, 2013b). The attunement to being in (or being-with) the

dance that we had euphorically experienced and cherished on several occasions, performed on Tine's gestures. She quietly and respectfully managed the entrances and exits according to the children's desire both to enter and stay on the floor. Since Tine took on this task, I could focus entirely on what happened on the floor, in the dance between myself and the children.

This situation sheds light on what the collaboration between Tine and myself had evolved into. From practicing together with me, experiencing both doing and teaching dance (Buck & Snook, 2007), Tine intuitively, through a transcorporeal reading of the situation, understood and supported my artistic work on the floor, and at the same time managed to take care of the children's needs (Christophersen, 2013b). Tine was engaged in choreographic leadership (Østern, 2019), where she sensed and created space and possibilities for the dancers on and off the floor. Through her, the children's response-ability to my proposal of dancing together was offered space.

My choreographic leadership consisted of bodily listening, in a way practicing my response-ability to the dance that was happening around me. Because of Tine, I was free to plunge entirely into the dance itself: receiving and giving impulses, trying to understand, and at the same time maintaining what was happening on the floor. This response-ability I understand as a complex mode of communication, where my dance and the children's dance, together with Tine's leadership supporting our dance, entangled and intra-acted (Barad, 2007). To us, the "open-floor" improvisation became a strong moment of choreographic-pedagogic entanglement (Østern, 2018b), where choreography and pedagogy blended and melded together, performing on each other. A response-ability towards both the choreographic and pedagogic in the "open-floor" improvisation became available to me. As I was dancing with the children, I was also dancing and moving with the theme of birds, the classroom, my own and the teachers' desires and hopes for the dance project, with trust, with courage, and with care. I experienced this moment as a radical shift in my own dance teaching practice, where the entanglement between the pedagogic and choreographic movement created a rupture in my own conceptions of how I engage with dance education. To me, this shift was also about moving from reflection to diffraction, and from interaction to intra-action. The situation also destabilised me. I was taken by surprise that the children seemed to so much appreciate dancing with me (Christophersen, 2013a), to the extent that they did not want to leave the floor. Somehow, I must have underestimated the pedagogic and relational power of being together in the dance. I think that the dance that we danced offered a space for us, children, and adults, to be engaged in a sensible kind of dialogue, different than the one more current in the everyday life of school.

Tine and myself experienced this as a "perfect" moment of teacher-artist cooperation between us (Holdhus et al., 2021): a beautiful example of how we both nurtured the situation with our specific professional competency, and at the same time the intra-action (Barad, 2007) between us, the children, the dance, the project, entangled our practices. Dancing together became a transcorporeal material-discursive practice, informing and performing our leadership. Our bodies became a part of the apparatus (Deleuze & Guattari, 2003; Barad, 2007) through which we carried out our leadership. We experienced that this work led to establishing a pedagogic atmosphere (Juelskjær, 2020) of trust, a place where transformation could happen.

## **The methodological research apparatus; choreographing research with response-ability**

We asked earlier in the article; what the material-discursive practices we engage in do and how do they allow for response-ability? First of all, the fact that we are all inquiring from within, that we are positioned in our research as doers (and not viewers), we experience as having allowed us to access a position from which a rich research material is created. The research material is to us transcorporeal, in a sense bringing an embodied and relational research perspective to the fore.

An embodied and relational research perspective also renders us sensible to the research as something we and the children live. One important task for us (the adults) then is to be responsive to what happens in the process and to care for making the research liveable for all participants. Here, we turn to Chappell (2022) who refers to Donna Haraway and her definition of care: as curiosity and obliging oneself to curiosity. For example, we see diffraction as a methodological concept directing us towards caring for (or questioning) what happens when we are cutting-together-apart. Our obligation to care for how we intra-act with the entanglements we are a part of, is thus strengthened through the chosen methodological apparatus.

We find that the material-discursive practices we are practising our research through expand our possibilities for intra-action and response-ability. Interestingly, when it comes to dealing with ethical challenges, we experience the methodological apparatus to perform on us both as a challenge and a tool. For example, material-discursive practices like sensing or dancing allow our ethical compass to activate as something felt and lived. However, this requires that we inhabit the skills to listen to and be able to interpret the signals coming from one's own body and the bodies of others (human and non-human matter). As a sort of listening with the body like we have evoked when we write about transcorporeal reading in stop-moment 3. This is an insight that has led us to wonder if listening with the body (or transcorporeal reading) is a skill that renders us as researchers' response-able to the emerging research.

Continuing on these lines, we also earlier raised the question of how to create a methodological apparatus of response-ability. Here we find that cutting-together-apart with choreography is performative for our discussion. We would state that the transcorporeal, diffractive, enmeshed and relational approach to research methodology, that we have described here, is choreographed. Klien imagines a choreographic practice "whose methodologies of intervening, steering, offering and (re-) arranging can be applied to other fields of human knowledge production as well as human interaction." (Klien, 2008, p. 39). In this sense, we find that choreography offers possibilities for both creating response-ability and manoeuvring through the ethico-onto-epistemological complexity in our dance project.

Klien also writes that the choreographer is "negotiating intended change within his/her environment." (Klien, 2008, p. 40), This resonates with us as we wonder if creating and negotiating space and movement within the research process, with and for the human and non-human bodies in the research, is at the core of our research practice. Maybe the practice of negotiating is important for how we as choreographers-researchers-teachers render ourselves and other human

and non-human bodies in our research response-able? A question that would be interesting to explore further is how we through transcorporeal material-discursive practices exercise negotiation. Also, we find that the methodological apparatus performs on our collaborative learning and the creative and pedagogical process in the dance project. It is thus difficult for us to draw a line between research methodology, choreography and pedagogy. How we actively negotiate between these three practices could make a question for future work.

### **Expanding bodies and practices, plunged into dance together**

In this article we have inquired into three stop-moments creating choreographic-pedagogical and methodological insights as an emerging collaborative learning community in the Bird project. Our learning community expands beyond us, the adults, to also include the children and the non-human materials we diffract with through the dance project.

The stop-moments created in the article all revolve around affective experiences, where children and adults intra-act through dance in various ways, and the affective spaces (McCormack, 2013) created through dancing become meaning-making moments in between arts and education (Sortland & Gudbrandsen, 2021), as well as moments of learning, deepening our “professional wisdom” (Chappell et al., 2011, p. 152) as a learning community.

Dancing became performative in this process. With the teachers’ support I was allowed to be, to flow, through the artistic-choreographic process with the children (Christophersen, 2013a), and give the dance the heightened attention that I recognise from when I perform, for example, in a dance performance. Through dancing, I could give and receive choreographic-pedagogic impulses (Østern, 2018b), where the different aspects and participants of the project entangled. Dancing thus expanded into an aesthetic practice through which we were learning and teaching, relating, listening, researching, daring, understanding, inviting, trusting, flowing, resisting, and choreographing. To us, this shows the strong potential for learning through dance as an embodied (Chappell et al., 2011) and artistic process, and the importance of becoming aware as well as sharing affective spaces between children, adults, teachers, artists, school, and arts.

When we started writing this article, we focused on the insights created in the professional collaborative learning community between us as adults. But as we have been thinking through the concepts of intra-action, diffraction, and through the expanded notion of choreography, the collaborative learning community has expanded. Wolf suggests that teacher learning (and artist learning, we would add) increases in collaborative interdisciplinary contexts when “the stream of learning” (p. 93) is both ways, and that “teacher learning is inextricably linked to student learning” (2008, p. 92). We think of Wolf’s two suggestions as intertwined, as a rhizomatic (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003) “stream of learning” (Wolf, 2008, p. 93), acknowledging what the children bring into the collaborative learning process, not only as learners, but as creators. In our project, dancing as a transcorporeal material-discursive practice (Barad, 2007; Lenz- Taguchi, 2012) challenged the hierarchies between who is the teacher and who is the learner: dancing allowed for everyone to feed into the process. We think that this highlights the potential of arts and arts-making processes for creating space in educative processes and contexts. Erasing the

learner/teacher dichotomy also gives agency to the participants to equally perform on and gain ownership of the collective process (Chappell et al., 2011).

By thinking of a rhizomatic stream we also challenge the more traditional image of the creative togetherness between artist and child, where the teacher is reduced to having a disciplinary role (Christophersen, 2013b). The teachers were occasionally acting as the bridge between myself as an artist and the pupils (Christophersen, 2013b), but they were also actively performing in the creation of the workshops as a part of the rhizomatic stream, where pupils, teachers and artist were dancing and researching the theme of birds together. We understand this as forming a sort of “communal cohesion” (Chappell et al., 2011, p. 152) created through performing response-ability to each other and the material entanglements throughout the dance project. Connecting to and giving value to the teachers’ feedback on the artistic and pedagogic choices changed how I viewed myself and my role in the dance project. From thinking that I would create space for the children by not taking too much space with my dance, I changed to understand how much my dance modelled an example for them. Dancing or not, I do take space the minute I set my feet inside their classroom. I believe this shows how important it is for us adults to be aware of how we occupy space in school. In this project we chose to occupy the space through dance: a dance that had the power to open for the children (and the teachers) to access their dance or to change ideas about how birds move, and also create possibilities for response-ability such as relating, daring, and trusting. This makes me think more about how I dance and what set of aesthetic values I push forward through my dance, because the aesthetic values model so much more than just dancing. Through the dance, I also model a way of being together. Again, it seems appropriate to point towards the ethico-onto-epistemological complexity that emerges through and because of our learning community.

We believe the project challenges the gap between arts and school, and the professional practices of teachers and artists (Hall, Thomson & Russell, 2007; Chappell et al., 2009): not because we erased the gap, but rather because we insisted on the professional competencies and differences of the artist and of the teacher (Chappell et al., 2011; Christophersen, 2013b). Instead of them being contradictory (Christophersen, 2013a), we explored the diffraction between these differences, making them perform in the project. The diffraction between our different practices created performative cracks (Østern, 2018b) to learn from. Through talking, dancing, and observing each other, we shared hopes and desires of both artistic and pedagogic concern (Wolf, 2008). Listening to and acknowledging what the others proposed by letting it perform on the project made us turn to a collective response-ability and understanding of how we could give direction to the project for it to support the work of the children. We think about this process as a choreography of inviting, including, listening and encouraging, created through our learning community.

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