

Dance Teacher Educators' Identity

Hilde Rustad and Marit Skreiberg

ABSTRACT

This article investigates the professional identity of dance teacher educators by looking at one specific educator. We show how the practice-based dance knowledge acquired through the act of dancing creates a foundation for teaching dance and dance teaching, as well as theoretical dance subjects, such as dance pedagogy. Through this research, it has become apparent that there has been a lack of educator education in dance teacher education in Norway, and therefore, dance teacher educators can be understood to be self-taught. We show how, by making conscious choices, dance teacher educators have the possibility to enter and pursue educator education; how, through these choices, one gains new experiences; and how meaning making and experience are closely connected with identity construction as an ongoing process. The article adopts a phenomenological research approach inspired by Max van Manen, and the materials were gathered through interviews, conversations and textual readings.

SAMMENDRAG

I denne artikkelen tar vi for oss dansepedagog-utdanneridentitet. Gjennom å undersøke én spesifikk utdanneridentitet viser vi hvordan praktisk basert dansekunnskap tilegnet gjennom dans skaper et fundament for danseundervisning og for undervisning av hvordan å undervise dans, så vel som for teoretiske danseemner. Gjennom denne undersøkelsen synliggjøres en mangel på «utdanner-utdanning» innen dansepedagogutdanning i Norge, og hvordan dansepedagogutdannere derfor i stor grad kan forstås som autodidakte. Vi viser i tillegg hvordan artikkelens gjennom bevisste valg har tilegnet seg «utdanner-utdanning», og parallelt hvordan erfaring og meningsdannelse er nært knyttet til identitetskonstruksjon som pågående prosess. Artikkelen har en fenomenologisk filosofisk og metodisk tilnærming i tråd med Max van Manen, og forskningsmaterialet er samlet gjennom intervju, samtale og lesing av relevante tekster.

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Introduction

This article explores dance teacher educator identity. We have chosen to do this by exploring the identity belonging to one particular female dance teacher educator, Marit Skreiberg, who is one of the two authors of this article. The article identifies and describes important elements in the construction of dance teacher educator identity, and looks at experience and meaning as described from the subjective perspective of one person. We have asked how meaning connected to dance and education has played a part in the construction of Marit's dance teacher educator identity. Our research makes visible how such identity is constructed and reconstructed within the Norwegian dance education context in one particular case, and points at important connections between lived experience, meaning making and identity construction.

Marit Skreiberg is employed by The Norwegian college of dance /Norges dansehøyskole where she has been working for more than thirty-seven years. This institution was in former times named 'Ballettinsittuttet' (1966 - 1985) and 'Den Norske Balletthøyskole' (1985 - 2011). In order not to cause too much confusion to the reader, we have used its present name 'The Norwegian college of dance' (2011 -) regardless of time period. All students are educated both dance teachers and dancers. The focus of the article, however, is dance teacher educator identity, and the term 'educator' refers to a person working in higher education.

Although elements which construct educator identity may overlap between educations, we believe

the construction of professional dance teacher educator identity to be quite different from most other teacher educator identity constructions, as dance in our case is characterized by being a physical and aesthetic bodily movement art practice.

According to Izadinia (2014, 426–27) teacher educator identity still seems to be under-researched, and especially teacher educators' professional identity seems not to be recognized as important. Research literature on dance teacher identity (Wang 2012), and teacher educator identity (Davey 2013, Izadinia 2014) does exist, but our search for research specifically on higher education dance teacher educator identity, has not given any results.

Phenomenological approach

In order to answer our research question which is *what kind of elements are involved in the construction of dance teacher educator identity*, we have chosen a phenomenological approach as this question is closely connected to the experience of becoming dance teacher educator. Methodology and method are closely linked, and in line, with Max van Manen as described in his books *Researching lived experience* (1990) and *Phenomenology of practice* (2014). As such, the research belongs to the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry.

Our aim is to describe identity constructive elements concerning dance teacher educator identity. Van Manen defines lived experience as «experience that we live through before we take a reflective view of it» (van Manen 2014, 42), and we understand pre-reflective experience as central in our enquiry. We are



Marit Skreiberg. Photo: Camilla Storvøllen

investigating the lived experience of one dance teacher educator, from which we have detected thematic quality and meaning.

Thematic analysis involves making sense of a text and lived experience by interpreting its meaning, and can be described as «a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure-grasping and formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of 'seeing' meaning.» (van Manen 1990, 79)

Method and material

During the research process we were both working at the Norwegian college of dance in Oslo, and as dance teacher educators we find the topic of the article interesting and important. Inspired by the article «Writing together metaphorically and bodily side by side: an inquiry into collaborative academic writing» (Ritchie and Rigano 2007) we chose to write together; there has recently been an increasing trend for researchers to collaborate in research writing (Ritchie and Rigano 2007, 7). We used both «lead-writing»

where Hilde took the lead role in writing the first draft, and «bodily co-present collaborative writing» which means we were sitting beside each other and one person would talk and the other person would be writing (Ritchie and Rigano 2007, 4). In addition we wrote separately and shared documents with each other via e-mail.

The research material consists of experiential biographical material and is a result of 3 semi-structured interviews (SI), several research conversations (RC), and one essay (Skreiberg 2011). Hilde interviewed Marit and the conversations between the authors happened both as prolongations of interviews and separately, and throughout this process we both made notes. Hilde wrote down what Marit said in interviews. The interviews were used to «... explore and gather experiential narrative material» and as a «...vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interview) about the meaning of an experience» (van Manen 1990, 66). Marit's

essay «Why must I dance?» (Skreiberg 2011) is autobiographical personal narrative which Marit wrote as part of studying non-fiction prose. We understand the essay as a «personal life document» (Unrath, Anderson & Franco 2013, 84), and it consists partly of phenomenological descriptions, and partly of reflection and analysis.

The trustworthiness of our work has been strengthened by the fact that Marit, as both research subject and author, has read and reread the text throughout the research process which lasted from October 2014 to May 2015, and from August to October 2016. Working together in periods provided opportunities for reflection upon former reflection. In employing a method where *writing together* and *writing as research* has played an important part, we have sought to capture the constructive elements of Marit's dance teacher educator identity. According to van Manen (2014, 389, 1999, 90) writing is in itself a method, and the research is the writing. However, we understand the conversation between us, and the dialogical relationship of the research process, as equally important.

Identity

Marit's involvement in and with dance is closely interwoven with her life as a whole. Giddens (1991, 76) claims that autobiography as interpretative self-history is at the core of identity. Although being aware that experience from all parts of life may be involved in the process of constructing professional identity, we have delimited the research area to personal experiences connected with dance and education. We realize this may go on behalf of showing Marit as a fully dimensional person, and as a shortcoming in the research project. However, we understand the chosen material as closely connected to her educator identity, and we made the decision in order not to make the article too long, and because we wanted to stay close to professional identity construction, which may resonate with other educators.

Van Manen writes:

In drawing up personal descriptions of lived experiences, the phenomenologist knows that the patterns of meaning of one's own experiences are also the possible experiences of others and therefore may be recognizable for others (van Manen 2014, 313).

In correspondence with van Manen we find it reasonable to believe that the description of elements constructing Marit's educator identity may resonate with how other dance teacher educators identify elements in the construction of their identity, as we believe many may have had their professional identities constructed in similar ways as Marit.

When it comes to 'identity' our point of view is that identity is temporal, always in movement, and something which develops throughout life (Møller 2004, 16). It is always as process; construction and reconstruction of identity is ongoing and involves meaning making and lived experience. Identity is neither something one is born with nor decided by society, it is a way of creating ontological meaning (Møller 2004, 66). The construction of identity involves an effort to combine past, present and expected future, and is but a continuous movement from which meaning is created (Lave & Wenger 1991, 34, Møller 2004, 76). In other words identity is not merely a result of unconscious choices, but of consciously made choices, which relates to Giddens (1991, 75) famous quote «We are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves». We understand identity as something where the person in question has a fairly stable, continuous perception of self-identity, and where «... the decisive element is the ability to keep one's personal narrative going» (Giddens 1991, 76). Other research suggests that «identity emerges in and through narrative» and that «experiences of our personal and professional lives compose that narrative» (Unrath, Anderson & Franco 2013, 82).

During the research period we have identified different social community practices Marit has participated in, in order to understand her construction of professional identity as learning, meaning making, and negotiation of identity. According to Wenger (1998) participating in social communities of practice is especially important as to how one's identity is formed.

Jerome Bruner (2004, 694) writes «... eventually the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organize memory, to segment and purpose-build the very 'events' of a life.» Additionally the transformation from spoken word to written text is important, something which is expressed interestingly in the following quote «Writing the text subjectifies our understandings of this experience but at the same time the printed text itself objectifies our experience. In this way 'writing plays the inner against the outer, the subjective self against the objective self, the ideal against the real'» (van Manen 1990, 129, in Ritchie and Rigano 2007, 8). Reflection, dialogue, writing together and separately, as well as reading each other's writing, brought the research process forward. As identity is always in movement, and based on Bruner and van Manen, this research process may, in itself, be understood as identity constructive.

Elements of identity construction

Short biographical story line: In 1960, at seven, Marit danced classical ballet for a short period. At 12 she started dancing again, at Jorunn and Even Kirkenær's evening school, this time mostly jazz dance. At 14 she was teaching dance for the first time. In high school she danced folkdance, jazz dance and ballet. At 20 she started her three year education at The Norwegian college of dance (founded by Jorunn Kirkenær), to become a dancer and dance teacher. As a student she was singled out to teach in evening school (1975-

1997). After graduating she stayed in London for half a year, taking classes in dance and pilates, and teaching dance to students. When returning she attended daily dance classes for professional dancers, and worked as a dancer and dance teacher. In 1978 she was asked to teach at The Norwegian college of dance part-time. Parallel to this she was teaching part time at Fagerborg highschool dance department (1982-1997) and Jorunn Kirkenær's evening school. From 1997 onwards she was teaching full time at the Norwegian college of dance. In 1993 she started a longer study of special needs pedagogy, but stopped after one year. Later she studied pedagogical supervision (2001), vocational pedagogy (master degree 2007), and non-fiction prose (2012). Marit has been sitting in committees for the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT), and the board of Dancing in school (Dans i Skolen). She is currently teaching a weekly, jazz dance class for adults in addition to her full time job.

Marit's first encounter of dance made a lasting impression. She writes:

I have always danced, I am told. I did not have to learn to like to dance, but to like other activities. When ballet was given to me the first time, it was soon taken away from me again. It was an ephemeral meeting between me, a little seven years old girl, and the magic world of ballet (Skreiberg 2011, 2).

One way to understand Marit's first dance experience, about which she writes it was «soon taken away» from her, is that she experienced dance as meaningful and as something which *belonged* to her. It seems the construction of Marit's dance-identity started at this early age, and that she through this meeting somehow formed a lasting bond with dance.

The fact that she started teaching dance at 14, shows how she felt ownership to dance, and how



ownership gave self-confidence and enabled her to teach at a very young age:

I loved my weekly dancing, so after some time I wanted to share the joy with my friends. I went to the headmaster of my school and asked him for help. He thought this a good initiative and gave me a room for free. I was thrilled. (SI)

Marit's early teacher experience seems based upon her enthusiasm for dance and trusting herself to teach others. This corresponds with how she reflects that she has «... been more interested in the practice of teaching dance, than in being a dancer» (SI).

When she started studying in 1973 her class was the fourth in line to start the education at The Norwegian college of dance. Concerning learning teaching, the policy of the school was clear, Marit explains, «We had to have pedagogy so that the students could earn a living later on» (RC).

Of 24 students, she was the only one who after graduating was invited to teach. This indicates how

*Marit Skreiberg recreates teaching Jazz Ballet students at the 50-year anniversary celebration performance for the Norwegian College of Dance, June 18, 2016.
Photo: Camilla Storrø.*

she as a student inhabited, and perhaps made visible, recognizable educator potential. She accepted the offer and the transition-period from being student to being educator seems non-existent. This may be understood in relation to the following quote:

Watson (2006, 510) [who] suggests that identity may, in fact, color action when stating «who we think we are influences what we do; there is a link between professional identity and professional action» (Unrath, Anderson & Franco 2013, 83)

The offer to teach confirmed Marit's professional identity, based on former teaching experience and teacher education, and made her make the step into «professional action» to teach in dance teacher education.

There were no other dance teacher educations

in Norway at the time, and no other places to look for educated teachers who could teach in dance teacher education. As student at The Norwegian college of dance Marit was educated dancer and dance teacher, but not dance teacher educator. This means it was *the experience of teaching in dance teacher education* in itself, which started reconstructing her identity from dance teacher to dance teacher educator.

When returning from London Marit did daily dance classes, and worked as dancer and dance teacher. Dancing, in most technical classes is repeatable and reproducible, and the traditional way of learning is often through observation and imitation. Such 'every day practice' implies certain kinds of meaning to the dancing person, and people who are dancing, performing, teaching and spending time in dance contexts, acquire various dance related experiences that may be understood separately and/or interconnected, and as playing an important part in the construction and reconstruction of dance teacher educator identity.

In one of our meetings Marit is suddenly up on her feet, jumping and waving her arms in the air exclaiming «I think of myself firstly as a practitioner!» Marit's movement outburst indicates how dance as lived experience and bodily knowledge is right under her skin, ready to be used at any moment. «It often starts as a tingling somewhere in the body. The tingling sensation grows and often spreads quickly, and then I just have to move the limb where it starts. [] Eventually it becomes a dancing motion sequence, ...» (Skreiberg 2011, 1)

For many years Marit has been involved in work concerning how the school's curriculum corresponds with demands coming from the Norwegian ministry of education. Today the ministry is engaged in what goes on, and in controlling quality in higher education, but when Marit started working as an educator she had a lot of individual and institutional freedom concerning what and how to teach. She tells that in

former times the educator could have strong influence on curriculum, and thereby on institutional identity (RC).

«I was on my way to change tracks completely» (RC), Marit explains about how she in 1993 started studying special needs pedagogy. Marit's private narrative includes getting a divorce and being a single mum, and how to cope with everything was in periods challenging. She wanted to change tracks not only because of her turbulent private life situation, but because she could not see herself teaching new and unfamiliar dance genres such as hip-hop and break dance. However, she stopped studying special needs pedagogy, and chose to continue her dance-focused life narrative. «It is because of some inner drive that I'm still in this [dance] business» she says (RC).

Reconstructing educator identity

When Marit started her master-studies in vocational pedagogy, participating in a quite different social community of practice opened up new horizons. «It has given me confidence and independence witch have helped me to develop and inner safety», she says (SI). There is of course major differences between dance people and others, as people who have been dancing for years inhabit movement experience others cannot share. However, it astonished Marit that it seemed so easy for outsiders to grasp what dance and dance teacher education was about, and in a similar way to discover her knowledge clearly had relevance and transfer value to other fields of study. She was astonished because this was a contradiction to what to her seemed to be a general agreement residing within the dance community, - that everything which went on in the dance field was more or less incomprehensible to outsiders. In meeting with people from other fields she had to negotiate meaning in experience, and being accepted by them brought about an increase in self-worth (Izadinia 2014, 431).



Actual dance teaching may happen as a result of conscious planning and thorough considerations, but it may as well be the result of 'simply' passing on one's tradition. Marit says that answers to many questions were already given to her when she started educating students, «The values I got when I was a student were given to us without being pointed out, I think. I can no longer remember them exact but they are probably part of my identity, - they live their life in my teaching» (SI). This quote relates to Tore Lindholm's writing on the concept 'tradition':

Being unquestioned as to adequacy and sharedness, a tradition situates its recipients, providing them with a specific repertory of interpretations, responses and courses of action which are spontaneously at hand (Lindholm 1985, 110)

This means the tradition one is educated within is decisive for how one thinks, teaches and passes on the tradition one belongs to. Similar to Marit's experience Lindholm points out how the answers to questions that may arise are already given. The point being that in

Marit Skreiberg recreates teaching Jazz Ballet students at the 50-year anniversary celebration performance for the Norwegian College of Dance, June 18, 2016.
Photo: Camilla Storvøllen.

studying vocational pedagogy, and in meeting with other traditions both different and similar to her own, Marit had to negotiate meaning in experience, and by doing so she radically reconstructed her identity and is today less likely to pass on tradition uncritically.

Today many employees at the Norwegian College of dance are educated elsewhere. Some of Marit's colleges belong to different dance teaching traditions, and by interacting with colleges Marit continues to learn, make meaning, and negotiate her identity (Wenger 1998).

Marit is nowadays teaching theoretical subjects only, and in one conversation she explains and demonstrates how she in teaching, while talking to her students, illustrates, or accompanies, what she says by doing recognizable dance repertoire (RC). She does not have to plan or exercise dance movements; she relies on embodied experience. By moving dancing in theoretical classes she brings herself as dancer into life



in front of her students. In doing so she makes her past visible in the present moment. Importantly, she makes her students recognize in her – not ‘only’ the teacher of theoretical subjects, but the dancer/dance teacher. Marit experiences that showing herself dancing helps her communicate with students: «My students and I have the same platform», she says, «we have both the dancing and the passion for dance in common, - it is when doing something, and being in action, the words become real» (RC). Practical dance knowledge matters to the students and gives Marit credibility and an authority she otherwise would not have possessed.

This relates to whether it is necessary for the educator to embody dance knowledge as part of her professional dance teacher educator identity. To our knowledge many Norwegian educators are educated as dancers and/or dance teachers, and may have worked as professional dancers. They are in other words not educated specifically to work in higher education. However, dance as bodily knowledge seems to be an important element in constructing dance teachers educator identity.

Marit is currently teaching a weekly dance class to a group of women. She started at 55, after having

Marit Skreiberg recreates teaching Jazz Ballet students at the 50-year anniversary celebration performance for the Norwegian College of Dance, June 18, 2016.

Photo: Camilla Storvøllen.

been asked to help finding a teacher for this group she decided to have a go at it herself.

It is Tuesday evening a quarter to eight. My class has already started. With my eyes I sweep the room and meet the eyes of expectant adult women. The windows are coated with sweat, and we are all focused on what's happening inside. As I move I hear myself counting: five, six, seven and eight, one more time: Stretch up on five, turn right on six, flick ball change, on seven and eight! (Skreiberg 2011, 5)

She appreciates how dance-movements are repeated within this familiar situation of teaching. To Marit the meaning of teaching dance connects the present with her past, and reawakens experience which she expects to be part of her future. The very *continuity* of her dance teaching is in itself meaningful.

Educator values

Marit keeps close contact with her students, whom she teaches for three years, and between educator and student there is the possibility of forming strong dialogical relationships.

The students feedback, their honesty, not always put in a nice way, have often been the inspiration for me to ask myself over and over again, is this the right way to put it, will there be other ways to understand this? What is the newest research on this, - is there any? (RC)

This quote shows both how student – educator relationship can be complicated, and how to Marit, being an educator means to constantly questions oneself. This corresponds with how other teacher educators have identified trial and error techniques, self-evaluation and personal readings as important techniques to shape their identity (Izadinia 2014, 433).

Marit reflects upon how all teachers are role models, and how it is important for her to be aware of the values she represents. She tries to show her students how they can recognize differences in values outside of, as well as within, the dance field. She emphasizes how she understands her work to be about questioning, relations and relation building (RC).

Marit tries to create student awareness considering how to be a dance teacher student in a meaningful way. She focuses on becoming a teacher, how to teach dance, and teaching and learning. She says an important part of her work is about teaching how to be good at preparing, teaching and reflecting. At the same time she focuses on educating students how to become «good human beings». She involves classical educational values, and explains her pedagogical project to be about generosity, respect and humility, combined with critical, but constructive, reflection (RC). Her educator values relate to ethics and to what van Manen calls the more «elusive

dimensions» of teacher identity, such as «reflective being, pedagogical virtues, teacher qualities, moral practice, and pedagogical thoughtfulness and tact.» (van Manen 1999, p. 77)

Discussion and summary

Qualitative inquiry is based on the idea that no interpretation is ever complete, and we are aware that our analysis and interpretations are not the only possible ones. In retrospect we regret the fact that we did not consider it necessary to record interviews and conversations, as this would have made our working process easier and more transparent. In spite of this we believe we have achieved some new insights concerning the construction of dance teacher educator identity.

Important elements in the construction of Marit's dance teacher educator identity are the choices of education and additional education, and personal meaningful experiences such as the very first meeting with dance - leading into a lifelong bonding with dance. Further, - early teaching experience constructing teacher identity, combined with offers to teach which gave trust and self-confidence. Such offers suggests teacher educator potential as something which may be recognized by others.

Important insights achieved are how the very experience and practice of teaching in higher education in itself which played the most central part in Marit's educator identity construction. Additionally, already acquired professional identity is of importance as to how the educator develops her work further and makes choices, and whether and in what ways the educator's embodied dance knowledge is present and plays a visible part in her professional educator identity.

One way to understand the transformation from dance student – to teacher – to educator is through the meaning of tradition including the reproducibility of the different aspects of dancing, which connects to

bodily knowledge residing within the person as lived experience. Additional education involving meetings with other communities of practice, in order to learn and enhance the chances of staying within the field of dance teacher education is important.

We understand the very continuity of Marit's professional life-narrative as related to Giddens (1991, 76) who writes that auto-biography is at the core of self-identity, and is something that has to be worked at. Marit's ability to keep her professional narrative coherent and ongoing has been, and still is, a decisive element in her identity construction.

This article makes visible how dance as bodily knowledge may create a foundation for teaching theoretical dance subjects such as dance pedagogy. The shared experience of dancing opens up for dialogical relationships between educator and student. Showing embodied dance knowledge makes a difference and gives credibility and authority to the educator of theoretical subjects; it gives possibilities for communication with students educators without dance experience have no access to.

It seems paradoxical how Marit today, while solely teaching theoretical subjects in education, considers her embodied dance experience to be of uttermost importance. In how she understands her professional identity she puts practice based dance experience prior to theoretical dance pedagogical knowledge. This suggests how meaning residing within the lived experience of dancing matters to educators, and points at a possible underestimated value of practice in the teaching of theoretical subjects in dance teacher education and elsewhere.

By teaching dance and educating dance teachers, as well as moving dancing when teaching theoretical subjects, Marit is upholding a dialogic relationship between teaching dance and dance teacher education, and between practice and theory. This can be understood as a method to help bridge the gap between theoretical and practical dance teaching subjects.

Marit became educator by learning by doing. Although the dance traditions she entered and was educated within can be understood as providing the guidelines for her work both as dance teacher and dance teacher educator, she had no 'educator education' when she started working. As a teacher in higher education she is autodidact, a self-taught person who learned her subject through practicing, without the benefit of a formal education. However, by actively seeking relevant additional academic 'educator education' she put herself in situations where she had to negotiate meaning and reconstruct her identity. Since Marit started teaching in the Norwegian college of dance some 30 years ago, much has changed, and today demands such as research based teaching, is required. Her choices coincided with how the Norwegian ministry of education in later years has demanded that persons working in higher education need university degrees on the level of Master and PhD.

Marit has continuously looked for possibilities for learning and through taking on additional studies she has gained new knowledge. In her work as dance teacher educator she has applied new knowledge to former knowledge and experience. Scholarly and experienced based knowledge together constitutes her base for professional actions, and is central in her ongoing process of (re)constructing her identity as dance teacher educator. In Marit's professional narrative *teaching dancing* seems to be the meaning making core combining past and present, as well as expected future.

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BIOGRAPHIES

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Marit Skreiberg is an assistant professor in dance pedagogy at the Norwegian College of Dance (NDH), where she has been employed since 1978. In addition to playing a key role in developing and designing the college's curriculum, she has taught many different subjects during this time. Today, she primarily teaches theoretical subjects focused on dance teacher training. She holds a bachelor of arts from Ballettinstituttet (now the Norwegian College of Dance) and a master's in vocational education from Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (HIOA). The topic addressed and the question raised in her master's thesis was: How can project work contribute as a learning method to developing professional competence in dance artistry? maritsk@ndh.no