

From Two to One – An Exploration into the Integration of Artistic and Pedagogical Practices.

Micaela Kühn

ABSTRACT

This article concerns the first part of my final research project at the Danish National School of Performing Arts for a postgraduate diploma in Danseformidling/ Dance Partnership undertaken in the first term of 2016. It is an inquiry into the relationship between artistic and pedagogical practices in the context of dance education, initially aiming at their integration by looking for a common denominator.

Proposing a loop structure as a methodological and practical framework, I reflect on the research inquiry *'How can artistic and pedagogical practices integrate in the context of dance education?'*

To conclude, the notion of *participation* in art and pedagogy is addressed as one of the entries to the possible imbrication of the practices. It is proposed that underlining the participatory aspect of artistic and pedagogical practices would carry questions on the modes of production and spectatorship in the former and the taken-for-granted roles and methods in the latter. I am proposing that pedagogical formats with a strong emphasis on shared meaning making are helpful towards the integration for which I am aiming.

SAMMENDRAG

Denne artikel omhandler første del af mit endelige research-projekt på Danseformidlingsuddannelsen fra Den Danske Scenekunsthøjskole, udført i første semester i 2016. Det er en udforskning af forholdet mellem kunstneriske og pædagogiske praksisser i en danseuddannelsessammenhæng, initialt sigtende mod deres integration via identifikationen af en fællesnævner.

Ved at foreslå en loop-struktur som metodisk og praktisk ramme reflekterer jeg over forskningsspørgsmålet: *«Hvordan kan kunstneriske og pædagogiske praksisser integreres i en danseuddannelseskontekst?»*

I konklusionen bliver begrebet *deltagelse* i kunst og pædagogik adresseret som en indgang til den mulige sammenfletning af praksisserne. Det foreslås, at en understregning af deltager-aspektet ved kunstneriske og pædagogiske praksisser vil medføre spørgsmål til henholdsvis produktionsforhold og tilskuernes roller i den første type, og de forventede roller og metoder i den sidste. Jeg foreslår, at pædagogiske formater med et stærkt fokus på fælles meningsskabelse er hjælpsomt for at opnå den integration, jeg stiler efter.

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Introduction

The present article is based on my final dissertation for the postgraduate diploma in *Danseformidling*/Dance Partnership at the Danish National School of Performing Arts, in the frame of a practice-based research project. This diploma, equivalent to a master's program, focuses on the combination of artistic and pedagogical practice by implementing and facilitating participatory projects and teaching. The overlap of these two practices is the starting point for my final project and, consequently, this article.

As a *danseformidler*,¹ I do not see a distinction between my pedagogical and artistic practices. I consider them as one practice that is much richer than the sum of the two separate practices. The non-separation of the two practices or roles is where my main interest resides: an integrated understanding of artists who have a pedagogical sense present in their work and facilitators who consider their work to be equally artistic. The dissertation is an attempt to look for a common denominator and understanding of pedagogical and artistic practices. In the present article, I will focus on one of the angles of the inquiry: *participation* as entrance to the possible imbrication, which represents the first part, or *loop 1*, as I call it in the structure of my dissertation.

Practical contextualisation

This project was carried out between February and May 2016. I should acknowledge that this segment is the initial and not conclusive one, meaning that many questions remain open and are answered or narrowed down in the second loop.

All participants involved were active at the Danish National School of Performing Arts, either as a student or as a teacher. In the first loop, I gathered a group of seven volunteer students from the dance and choreography programme (equivalent to a bachelor's degree) at the school. Each received an invitation that explained my interest in exploring the notion of participation as a possible link or common denominator for artistic and pedagogical practices. It was important for me to underline the openness of the proposal: it was the initiation of an investigation rather than an established practice to share.

Working Concepts

Participation

I approach the theoretical aspect from my interest in relations: teacher and students need each other for education to exist, and dance needs an audience to be an art form. Without communication, none of this would exist. Going further, I identify my main interest as not just communication but also the activity of doing something with somebody else, or actively partaking in a shared situation. Therefore, I propose *participation* as a theoretical point of departure, bringing into question the concept of spectatorship and pedagogy as a practice of participation.

To narrow down the large topic, *participation*, and to establish a definition of it for this essay, I refer to theory on participatory performance, one reason why I chose Claire Bishop as a reference source: '(...) people constitute the central artistic medium and material, in the manner of theatre and performance'

(Bishop 2012, 2). This sentence follows a diverse list of names of 'post-studio practices' that she collects under the name of 'participatory art'. She stresses that the participatory aspect is neither about interactive performances based on one-to-one situations, nor about performances in which the audience serves as an 'activator', but about the plurality of 'people'. This aspect becomes more specific when it is put into the historical context of performing arts: Bishop states that in participatory art, 'the artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of situations; the work of art as a finite, portable, commodifiable product is reconceived as an ongoing or long-term project with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a «viewer» or «beholder», is now repositioned as a co-producer or participant' (Bishop 2012, 2).

I now return to *participation*, rather than to *participatory*, because it works as a broader umbrella, which also embraces the general everyday understanding of participating as simply doing something with somebody else or actively partaking in a shared situation. Moreover, *participation* offers the chance to examine work that might not be considered explicitly *participatory*: 'Even if a work of art is not directly participatory, references to community, collectivity (be this lost or actualised) and revolution are sufficient to indicate a critical distance towards the neoliberal new world order' (Bishop 2012, 12). For the clarity of this essay, I make the distinction between *participation* and *participatory*, with the second being the realisation of the first through formats and frames that make the partaking aspect explicit or obvious.

Hence, it can be said that participation implies a general turn towards critical thinking and a different understanding of being active. With regard to this, I found resonances in Jacques Rancière's words: 'Being a spectator is not some passive condition that we should transform into activity. It is our normal situation'

(Rancière 2009, 17). For him, the emancipation is about recognising the spectating situation as the normal one, and about undoing the partition between spectating and performing: 'Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting ... It begins when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or transforms this distribution of positions' (Rancière 2009, 13). As in Bishop's definition of participatory art, Rancière is stressing the questioning of the taken-for-granted roles and putting them at the centre of attention.

Pedagogy

To focus on the participatory aspect of education, I draw on Gert Biesta's theory of education, which concentrates on the relationship between student and teacher and the learning process itself, rather than on one specific end of the educational situation, be it the student or the teacher. Biesta proposes a model of education as the practice of participation, by addressing the active partaking in communication as a central element. He starts by elaborating on communication as participation, stating that 'meaning only exists in social practices, which means that it is located in between the individuals who constitute the social practice through their interactions' (Biesta 2004, 17). Thus, in order to obtain access to the available meanings in a system or a culture, or to establish new ones, one needs to participate by experimenting in social situations. Biesta continues by developing education as a practice of participation, saying that 'it is the social situation that emerges from the interaction between the teacher and the student that actually «does the education». In this respect, we can say not only that education happens in the gap between the teacher and the student. We might even say that it is this gap itself that educates' (Biesta 2004, 18). Given this, we can state that the teacher and the student encounter one another in a zone that neither of them can unilaterally control, and hence there is no control of the effects of the activities on either of them. According to Biesta's

proposal, that uncertain space is the one educating.

Returning to Rancière, I see some commonalities with Biesta's proposal. After explaining that every learning process requires the intelligence of translation in order to communicate with the intelligence of the other, Rancière continues by saying that 'this poetic labour of translation is at the heart of all learning' (Rancière 2009, 10). In the same book, he says that 'distance is not an evil to be abolished, but the normal condition of any communication'. If we complement both understandings from Rancière and Biesta, it could be affirmed that the translation is necessary because of the otherness of the other, and that it transforms the communication – hence the learning situation – into a shared possession of the partners in action. In the second quote, Rancière presents the distance as an essential requirement for communication to happen, which I find similar to Biesta's concept of a *gap*.

In brief, Biesta and Rancière acknowledge the importance of the relational aspect and the crucial distance between the participants, the translation process, the non-uniformity of it, the uncertainty of the possible outcome and the understanding of it as the re-creation of social situations. These working concepts – with Bishop on participatory art, Biesta on Pedagogy, and Rancière providing a second voice in both areas – constitute the point of departure for the practical work in the studio.

Open Research Session I

Together with the seven volunteer students, I conducted a four-hour Open Research Session (ORS), in the format of a one-time workshop. From a research perspective, the aims were to explore directions for the topic, to generate data in different formats (written, audio and video), to discuss the topic with people I appreciate and find interesting – the students and I knew each other previously – and, hopefully, to be able to narrow down the inquiry after it. Pedagogically, the objectives were to ignite some kind of self-driven

reflection on heavy topics from an empirical starting point rather than a theoretical one, and to present the idea of reflection-in-action and on-action as an artistic tool. I decided to call it an 'open research session', rather than a workshop or class, because of the openness in the possible outcome. The tasks were ideas I generated from studying the previously mentioned references. Here I will present the first two tasks we carried out together:

- Practicing reflection-in-action on participation as warm-up.

The first task of the session was an improvisation in which one would first define one's own role as either *spectator* or *performer*. This role was retained through the first round and swapped for the second one. Everyone received four questions/instructions on a piece of paper, placed in a random order: 'What is she doing?'; 'For whom is she doing it?'; 'Join her if you feel like it'; 'What am I doing?' Each person was also presented with the name of another participant to observe, that person being understood as the one identified in the questions. The participants were given four minutes to answer each question and were not allowed to advance to the next one until told to do so. Each person was observing and being observed at the same time.

The aim was to warm up physically and mentally by doing whatever was felt necessary on a physical level, and by waking up the sense of reflection-in-action. The idea was to initiate a reflection on the roles of *spectator* and *performer* intuitively, based on doing rather than talking about them: how active am I as spectator or as performer? Where is the limit between the two? Is there a limit? With regard to my interest in underlining the idea of reflection, I should mention Robin Nelson's concept of 'praxis', which he proposes as 'the possibility of thought within both «theory» and «practice» in an iterative process of «doing-reflecting-reading-articulating-doing» (Nelson 2013, 32). This

has been a relevant concept that accompanied this process, not only for the practical work in the studio but also as a methodological backbone.

- Interrupting by repeating.

After the reflection-in-action task, this provided an opportunity for more elaborated reflection-on-action triggered by questions posed by me: 'What is the difference between being a performer and being a spectator?'; 'As a performer, how much do you know about the spectator (and vice versa)?'; 'How much do you care about the experience of the other?' These questions were presented in relation to the previously described exercise (practicing reflection-in-action on participation as warm-up).

In groups of three, one participant took the role of speaker, one of the listener-speaker and one of listener-writer. The speaker talked freely on the topic; the listener-speaker interrupted the speaker by repeating words or sentences that appeared interesting, catchy or unclear; and the listener-writer wrote down those words. There was a time limit of four minutes for each constellation, followed by a rotation of roles, so that each participant adopted each position. After the three rounds, we collected all the papers and went through them individually in silence.

Findings

I gathered a substantial amount of data from the session: group discussions were recorded as audio files and all the written material was at my disposal. Inspired by Max van Manen's *selective reading approach*,² I worked with the audio files, applying my version of a *selective listening* approach; I chose to transcribe the quotes that appeared relevant to me in relation to the topic. After writing down the selected quotes, and in order to provide some distinction in their relevance, I applied my own form of triangulation: I compared my transcripts with what was in the papers as written documentation from the ORS, and I only selected the

quotes or concepts that were present in both.

Here, I present some of those quotes with their respective analysis:

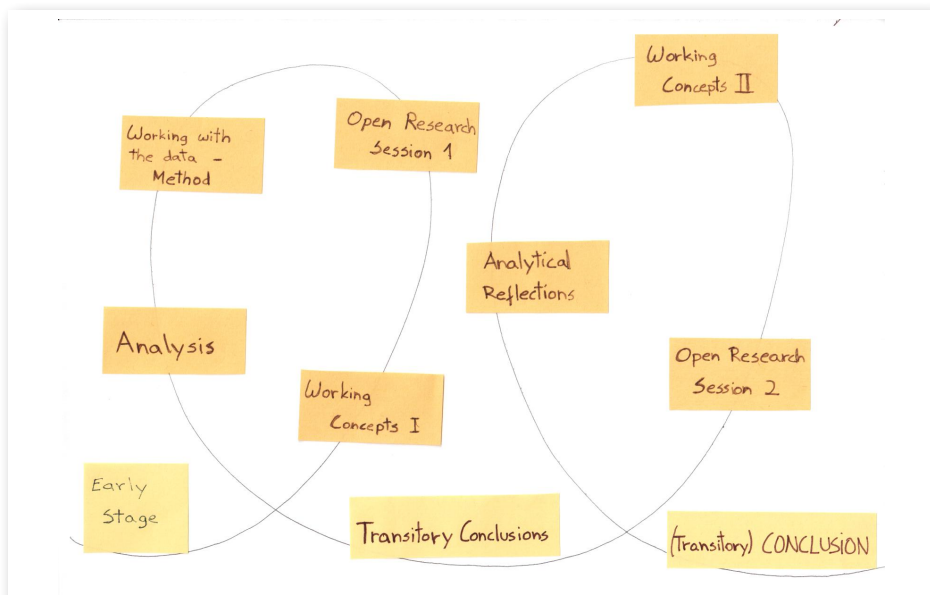
- Awareness of the gap and its uncertainty

There is like a certain amount of 'you know exactly where you are going but you still let things in', somehow. That you have the feeling that you can affect them if you want to, but actually, you don't have the need to affect them because you are guided already.

In this quotation, in which a student links the relationship between student and teacher to the one between performer and observer, one can observe how she addresses the reciprocal capacity of affecting each other through the interaction. Keeping in mind that she is talking about the pedagogical relation, it is possible to link her thoughts to Biesta's concept of the *gap*, and say that the gap or distance is sensitive and negotiable. Thus, knowing that the gap is not directly controlled by the partners in the interaction, as Biesta proposes, this quote can be interpreted as a realisation of the capacity of affecting it, if one has the awareness of that distance.

I don't know if you can make this comparison, but, like, a good teacher for me and a good performer, there is something that is the same. Like this confidence, or that you have it under control somehow.

There is somehow a level of trust, a little, even though you are challenging them (the audience) all the time ... there has to be some kind of trust, even though it is the craziest performance that invites you in ... There is something that needs to happen, or I feel that has this little pedagogical part in it.



Structure of the research: Loop 1 and 2

The above quotes suggest that in the pedagogical relation, as well as in the one between spectator and performer, the key elements are ‘something that needs to happen’, and ‘a certain level of confidence, to have it under control’. All quotes coincide in giving high relevance to the interaction, to what is happening between the teacher/performer and student/observer. Because of this focus on a third aspect – the relationship – and not directly on the people involved, one could say that it takes away a certain degree of the personal implications from the teaching situation: the actions of the teacher or the student would affect the relationship rather than affecting the other directly, giving more importance to what Rancière calls ‘the labour of translation’ and Biesta ‘the shared process of meaning making’.

However, ‘if education is located not in the activities of the teacher nor in the activities of the learner, but in the interaction’ (Biesta 2004, 12), then interaction is not going to happen in a vacuum: the activities are the ones that are going to offer a frame for interaction. Therefore, the activities should be well

thought through with regard to the possibilities for interaction they offer. In that sense, a pedagogy that wants to emphasise the participation aspect should focus on the social aspect of teaching: How can I as a teacher offer possibilities for interaction to happen? And equally importantly, how do I as a student stay open to and propose different ways of interaction?

Some hints at answers may appear in the formats I proposed during the ORS. I now proceed to analyse elements that can be abstracted from the exercises in congruence with the previous ideas.

‘Participatising’ the studio

Looking back at the ORS, I realise there is a double or *meta* approach: the subtopics discussed were related to participation within a participatory structure. We not only *talked about* participation, we also *engaged in* participation. This congruence between the content and the frame I call *participatising* the studio, inspired by Biesta’s statement that ‘we should think of

the curriculum as a representation of practices inside the walls of the school, and not as a representation of formal abstractions for these practices . . . the teaching of mathematics should be about bringing the practice of *mathematising* into the school' (Biesta 2004, 17).

As an example, the warm-up exercise ('practicing reflection-in-action on participation as warm-up') was in itself inspired by my interest in challenging the opposition between doing and observing. The task was about spectatorship and participation in its contents, and had a participatory frame. I chose a complex task with many layers and roles at the same time to underline the participatory aspect: everybody was necessary, because the roles were interdependent. Because of the complexity of the task, I proposed the method for reflection previously described, which underlined the shared meaning making, and thus participation, which was 'interrupting by repeating'. In this setup, there is a dependency on each other's roles, not just as a chain of reactions, but also in how the three different roles influenced each other: the *speaker* needs to keep in mind the tempo to allow the *writer* to write and at the same time that her own flow is being interrupted by the input of the *repeater* underlining possibly irrelevant ideas; the *repeater* needs to stay attentive to the one speaking and be aware that any interruption may alter the direction of the speech; the *writer* is receiving two inputs, listening to the one speaking and the other repeating, while being the one shaping the writing.

To sum up: Applying a method that underlines shared meaning making can be understood as a form of *participatising* the studio, instead of only examining it from the outside. Here, I applied a double layer, using formats that are underlining the shared meaning making, to generate a discussion about the same topic.

Conclusion

The topic of 'participation' was applied not just in the theme of the ORS but also, more importantly, in the

formats of the session. The congruence between these two is my form of applying what Biesta suggests is teaching by (re-)constructing a social situation, or the curriculum as a representation of practices.

Formats that require exchanging interdependent roles (e.g. interrupting by repeating) or dealing with multiple roles at the same time seem to trigger a sensibility that can be helpful for the idea of integration of pedagogical and artistic practices. In this case, with students who are open to experimentation and have a high level of abstraction, such as those with whom I worked, it is visible in their reflections. These specific formats have been arranged to stress clearly the participatory aspect of communication – *participatising* the process – in order to get the most information out of them for the sake of this project. In this context, this way of *participation* through very specific *participatory* formats has shown itself to be fruitful in relation to the aims of the research. This is not to say that *participation* would only happen through interactive formats; as mentioned before, it is inherent to any relational situation.

The commonalities of the question of spectatorship and interactive aspects of the mentioned formats trigger reflections on teaching and performing as created situations that share the uncertainty of a third element, namely the *gap* or *distance*. That uncertainty is not about simply letting things happen, but about having a focus on activities that offer spaces for interaction. If 'education is located not in the activities of the teacher nor in the activities of the learner, but in the interaction' (Biesta 2004, 12), activities take on a very important role, not because they educate but because they offer the frame for interaction.

Exploring the notion of *participation* appears as a direct way of entering pedagogical and artistic practices, because it acts as a thread between both. Participation in performance and education stands for a strong focus on interaction and on structures that facilitate interaction. Within the context of the

performing arts, it is connected to a change in the mode of production and, thus, the roles of *performer* and *spectator* that are taken for granted are questioned. The same can be applied to the pedagogical situation: Instead of focusing on the assigned roles (teacher as expert and student as ignorant), it stresses the relationship and the uncertainty and negotiability of it. It gives an explicit relevance to the gap or the distance between the two. As seen in the analysis, the teaching and performing situation seem to become closer when the participatory aspect is underlined and it can thus trigger a reflection on a common understanding of both, instead of seeing them as two separated practices.

Notes:

- 1 Since there is no exact translation for the word *danseformidler*, I keep the original in Danish. The closest approximation would be dance facilitator.
- 2 'In the selective reading approach we listen to or read a text several times and ask, What statement(s) or phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described? These statements we then circle, underline, or highlight.' (van Manen 1990, 93)

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BIOGRAPHY

Micaela Kühn Jara is a dance practitioner and facilitator based in Denmark. Micaela recently graduated with a postgraduate diploma in *Danseformidling* from the Danish National School of Performing Art. Micaela works as a facilitator and performer in South America and Europe and collaborates with artists from other fields, as well as giving pedagogical and choreographic

assistance. Her interest lies in making quality artistic processes available for people or situations where they are not usually accessible, as well as questioning established modes in the more professional arena. She is currently working with the inclusive dance company Szene2wei (Germany) and the choreographer Alfredo Zinola (Italy/Germany).