

Teaching Training in Art and Craft: Drawing as a Performative Act

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Abstract

Drawing is the one of most usual art and craft activity in Norwegian kindergartens. But is drawing as a dynamic, creative process understood and valued by early childhood educators? I use performative drawing to present children's drawing as a creative process to teachers-in-training under the new National Curriculum of Kindergarten Teacher Education. Using videos of student participants and their written feedback, I empirically engage these university students' personal experience of performative drawing. The results show how students both expanded their understanding of what a drawings session can be and gained in aesthetic understanding, laying the groundwork for new creative praxis in their kindergartens.

Key words: Early childhood education, art and craft, performance drawing

From policy to practice: the metamorphosis of art and craft in education

In 2012 Norway undertook a significant policy reform in early childhood education (ECE), codified in two major documents: The Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens and the National Curriculum of Kindergarten Teacher Education. These reforms were implemented in curricula in 2014 and teacher training has re-gearred itself correspondingly. In particular, in the area of arts, we used those documents to develop our current program plans and course descriptions across the country for university college ECE programs, which have undergone substantial changes in light of the reforms.

What were formerly considered three main subject areas for aesthetic pedagogy in ECE—art and craft, music, and drama—have been consolidated into a single knowledge area labelled Art, Culture, and Creativity (in Norwegian, *Kunst, Kultur, og Kreativitet*). With the divisions among these three subjects blurred, there has been a shift from subject-based training to knowledge-area based training. This in turn has presented challenges for academic planning, practical organisation of classroom projects, and implementation.

The purpose of the study and the research question

My artistic and academic background has been decisive in undertaking an alternative to the traditional way of production of drawings in early childhood education. Some of the aesthetic revelations I've had exploring the possibilities of materials, space, and engagement of the whole bodily are what I wish to convey to students when we work with two-dimensional form of expression. My approach is not only a theoretical discourse, but is empirically connected to my daily work with students' training. With my

background in visual art, as I've worked on developing ECE training under these new guidelines, I have developed approaches that highlight drawing's potential as a performative and social practice, organically incorporating into the drawing process. The aim of the study is to see how musicality and performativity can emerge from a drawing session within the field of visual art, rather than adding music and drama in an artificial or instrumental way to my praxis. My hypothesis is that a performative approach to drawing—encompassing bodily engagement, collaboration and nonverbal communication—creates a richer context for learning and development in the kindergarten. My goal is to contribute to a broader understanding, and improve the practice, of drawing in the kindergarten.

My research question, rooted in drawing workshop, is: How can a teaching session disclose the importance of a creative process? Elements as space, performative act and non-verbal communication are addressed to explore this question.

The current reality and future potential

My students have frequently described drawing in their kindergartens as an assignment to enable the preschool teacher to concentrate on other tasks, as an attempt to lower the level of noise in the classroom, or just something children do on their own. The traditional use of drawing in the kindergarten involves children sitting alone, using a crayon or a pencil, and drawing on an A4 sheet of paper placed on a table. Drawing serves as a kind of withdrawal, albeit creative one— from engagement with other children or the teacher.

While there is nothing wrong with drawing as a solitary, creative act for children, performative drawing holds great possibilities for preschool teachers give children physical and mental proximity, to experience security and care, and to foster self-expression. It has a hidden potential to integrate the social and performative aspects in the spirit of the cross-boundary approach to esthetics and creativity sought in the new Norwegian ECE reforms. In this case, art and craft, music and drama.

Background: from childhood to art/hood

As a 10-year-old pupil in a public primary school in Brussels I was fortunate to have a teacher who introduced us to what she called body language (*expression corporelle*). I learned only much later that the concept derived from *éducation populaire*, a 1930s movement among teachers in Belgium's Wallonia, based on the pedagogical ideas of Célestin Baptistin Freinet (1896-1966). At the time, all I knew was that the activities were great fun. My teacher took us out of the classroom to draw large-scale pictures with colour chalk on the cement ground of our school courtyard. She took us to the gymnasium to let us express ourselves bodily, with movements or miming inspired by words or music. Besides that, we had interschool correspondence and printed a school newspaper featuring our own writing and pictures.

The most interesting part of all these activities was the making and doing—that is, the ongoing creative process itself. It was during that process that we discussed different alternatives, had to listen to others' ideas, ponder different views, and make decisions together before coming up with a result. This use of different spaces, the autonomy given to pupils, the importance of artistic approaches and collaborative

projects engage children in a less dichotomist relationship between teachers and pupils. This pedagogical approach left a vivid impression in my mind.

At the beginning of my career as a visual artist over 20 years ago, one of my greatest revelations related to qualitative transformation that follows from merely quantitative shifts in scale. Going from small scale projects to monumental ones, brings out a significant experience. The relation between the body and the object (including the space) radically changes when working with objects much larger than one's own body, challenging one's sense of the body and its expressive potential. I realized this understanding of bodily experience and awareness when working large-scale would be useful to explore with my university students, and for them to bring to their classrooms as they take aesthetic education in the kindergarten in a more integrated direction.

For a long time my explorations as an artist were disconnected from my work as a teacher of future educators. This unresolved duality became, happily, a duo as I began to cultivate a more holistic approach to teaching and the learning process. From showing a piece of art in the classroom, usually visual art, I adopted a more performative way of working, as both an artist and a pedagogue simultaneously, inviting my students to join in a shared creative process. I became an artist-teacher.

Drawing as performance: what could be

My artistic and academic background have been decisive factors leading me to pursue alternative approaches to the traditional way of treating drawing in early childhood education. What I seek to convey to students is the transformative potential of rethinking use of materials, space, and the body in two-dimensional creative expression. Drawing can become a social praxis where the preschool teacher and children engage in mutual recognition, dialogue, and play.

Bakke (2013) envisages the kindergarten as a fantastic laboratory, an art workshop and a place for children to create, if the personal is aware enough to create opportunities (Bakke, 2013: 127, author translation). A pedagogy that enable children to be heard has been advocated by other too, like Trageton (1995), Bae (2004) Ringsted and Froda (2008), Åberg and Taguchi (2010), and Bakke (2011). And expanding the horizons for preschool children to manifest their desires, intentionality, and interests are themes in documents ranging from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to Norway's Framework Plan for the Content and Task of Kindergarten, down to local schools' annual plans.

To experience a piece of art is rewarding in many ways. To experience a creative process, however, is like experiencing art from the inside, getting under its skin, and affords a deeper understanding of subjectivity and reflexivity. As one student that participated in a performative drawing workshop in my class put it, I just let the ideas flow. I tried to do exactly what I thought, without letting my critical sense get in the way. I tried to think in term of gesture instead of graphic expression. Still another dimension emerges when creativity is joined by others, fostering cooperation and communication—and a further threshold is breached when the creative work involves not just talk but engaging our bodies in an unfolding performance. In a kindergarten where I observed a performative drawing session, I heard a five-year-old boy say afterwards, It was magical. One of my students working in the classroom said, We became a part of the paper.

In order to shift drawing from being something done instrumentally or as a time-filling occupation, or that is judged mainly for technical attainment, we need teachers who are better capable to see, understand, and recognize children as creative subjects.

Students, current and former, often show me pictures or films of art projects they do with children inspired by methods and approaches they had been exposed to in my university class. This feedback has pushed me to be more self-aware and reflective about the impact of my teaching methods. What happens when I invite students to participate in a creative process? How do they experience and express themselves, together with an artist? How do students experience aesthetic learning? What is the impact of my teaching strategies and learning approaches at a remove, when my students bring this knowledge into their kindergarten?

Performative drawing for university students in ECE

Performative drawing draws from performance art, which is interdisciplinary, involving the combination of two or more form of artistic expressions. Performance art relates to conceptual art, which prizes ideas over the formal or visual components. These contemporary artistic forms show how art can overflow traditional formal constraints. Performance art tends to be defined as an antithesis to theatre; it does not seek to present orthodox theatrical plays—for instance by abandoning any demand for linear narrative. The action is the main component of a performance, and the relation between the public and the performer is the object of this artistic expression (Ferrier, 1990).

Performance and conceptual art are well-known movements in contemporary art, but their techniques and approaches have not been applied very much in kindergarten or early childhood education.

A week prior the performative drawing workshop I meet the students outdoors and introduce them to land art in an open landscape. This opens a discussion about what art can be. Few ECE students, I find, are acquainted with contemporary art and only a small number visit regularly art galleries or museums. As we work outside inspired by land art, they get familiarized to abstract art and conceptual art. This expand students' sense of artistic possibility.

One small step toward opening up drawing to performance can be readily understood. Many years ago I used music as a source of inspiration in painting workshops, with students encouraged to picture the impressions they get from listening. For me, this was the first step toward a performative approach of a two-dimensional form of expression.

In 2014, I started to document the act of drawing focusing on the body's rhythmic and performative expressions. The students described that session as an unusual playing activity, as an inspiration to take further in the kindergarten, as an unfamiliar use of the whole body with large movements, or as an experience of flow and non-verbal communication.

These are some of the efforts that led me to hold performative drawing workshops and to attempt to empirically and qualitatively assess its effect.

Organisation of the performative drawing session

Finally, the workshop begins. I transform a part of the classroom by displaying large scale thick brown Kraft paper on the wall and floor. This metamorphosis of space is immediately noticed by the students, triggering their curiosity and priming them for the something that surely will come next. Here I am drawing on Reggio Emilia's idea of the room as a third pedagogue or a readable text (Hanson, 2012). The physical environment is crucial to Reggio Emilia's approach. The role of the environment is to inform and engage with children, and to encourage playful encounters. For Hanson, the room and its unexpected objects and arrangements open the door to new engagement and activities.

I ask if there are three students that are willing to play with me on the floor with charcoal. I also inform them that we need to take off our shoes and socks, and that I will film us over the course of ten minutes. With no more explanation for what is next, I soon have three participants ready to play and perform drawing together with me.

I inform the three students that we shall engage with our whole bodies, using large movements to inscribe patterns on the paper, as we evolve two-dimensional forms in a shared space. We do not plan what we draw, but rather improvised together over the 10 minutes.

Previously, I had placed a video camera on a tripod to film the process from a suitable angle, making sure that the camera catches the whole action and the four of us while we draw. I ask the rest of the students to take pictures or film the session with their own devices. By doing so each student group has an active participant (one of the students drawing with me) and a visual documentation (produced by the rest of the group). Their own visual material can be used for further reflections on performative drawing within their respective colloquia—which students tell me has helped them in trying out these practices in their own classrooms.

My method for data collection is empirical, qualitative (Repstad, 1993; Halvorsen, 1996; Creswell 2013), and explorative. Using video during the activities and then written responses of the student participants and observers afterwards, I document my teaching sessions *in situ*, in an effort to capture the lived and shared experience among several individuals. The video focuses on the students and myself in the process of drawing, which for this project is more important than the final product.

The aim of the data gathering is to get at the phenomenological approach of the aesthetic process: a study of lived experiences of persons (Creswell, 2013; 77). I emphasize the perspective of the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945) related to the body subject and the subject's awareness of experience.

In this article, I concentrate on feedback related to the aspects of flow, musicality, and bodily experience connected to the drawing process, the room, and material.

I ask all the students to write down how they have experienced the performative drawing session. Both those that draw with me and those that watched us write down a feedback with their impressions and reflections. I do not give them a questionnaire to fill out or specific questions to answer. I ask them to write how they experience this drawing session from a subjective perspective. Using this open-ended, non-normative form of reflection, I've collected feedback which express different aspects of the drawing session from a subjective point of view.

Results and discussion

Collected material: drawings on A4 paper and snapshot from the video records of the performance drawing session



Figure 1. University students' drawings on A4 paper, prior the performative drawing session.

Those drawings (Figure 1) show what students tend to accomplish when I give them colour crayons and an A4 sheet of paper placed on a table, with the task to draw whatever they wish. The drawings in figure 1 are representative for the common understanding of two-dimensional form of expression. It is close to naturalistic/figurative images. They are few students that accomplish more expressive or abstract images. I have carried out similar performative drawing sessions in Norway, Belgium, Spain, and the Netherlands. Most of the students, independently of their national or cultural background, made similar drawings as we see in Figure 1.

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Figure 2. Snapshot from the video records of the performative drawings

Those pictures from the performative drawings (Figure 2) show a more holistic, bodily, and collaborative approach within a shared space. The forms are mostly abstract, in contrast to the drawings in figure 1. It is this performative approach to drawing that students comment in the following section.

Collected material: written reflections from the students

Feedback consists of written reflections, both from students that partook directly in the performative drawing as well as those observing. For those in the latter group, the desire to be a part of the performance is often mentioned, and in some case the students expand the boundaries of the action to include themselves (imaginatively) in the creative action, in a way that recalls the blurring of boundaries between artists and audience in performance art:

What I felt when I saw the other draw today? I looked at them drawing from the sidelines, but I felt that it was an artistic experience for me too. The first thing I noticed was how quiet it was when they draw. They were quiet and we who watched were quiet too. But it was not an embarrassing silence, or an uncomfortable silence. It was a relaxing silence, and I noticed that everyone watching them was fascinated by the process.

It was interesting to observe the movements that were made by the students and the teacher. It was almost like a dance. They danced sometimes alone and sometimes together, in a nice combination. They stretched up on tiptoe, sat crouched down, stretched out their arms and legs in such a way that remind me of dance. (ABLU_16_Em_Gr.11)

This student did not draw with us, but still she enjoyed this experience as an artistic one, not only as a neutral viewer. As in performance art, the relationship between the performer and the public, and the process itself, is the oeuvre d'art, revealing the value of the process beyond any final product. She describes our bodily language (*expression corporelle*), our movements around the drawing and the displacements in space, as a dance.

Those participating directly in the performative drawing also of course often spoke of its artistic aspects:

It was a very, very good experience. I experienced myself as a real artist. I wish to bring this further to my kindergarten to invite and motivate the staff and the children by doing something like this. (ABLU_15_C1_1)

I experienced it as something enjoyable and that we were focused on the task. It is unusual to use the whole body with large movements and to walk on the drawing. This is something I believe I can do in the kindergarten. I saw that the others drew over my drawing, then I could take a step back and see a new pattern on the drawing. (ABLU_15_C1_3)

The collaborative aspect of this performative drawing is mentioned, in different terms, by many students. In particular, some note the quality of flow that they felt emerged, described both as an individual as well as a shared experience:

B4: It was pleasant to watch. Good flow.

B3: Everybody was equally producing. Was focused on the process.

B7: They collaborated. They did it together and commonly. Do together! Flow. Focus on the process.

B2: Everybody was in his/her own world, or maybe flow.

B9: They were in flow. Get inspired of each other.

B11: It was a very nice and relaxing experience. The participants where in a flow. Nice to watch such cooperation.

B12: They inspired each other.

B 1: They complemented each other. Flow. Collaboration.

B 2: Non-verbal communication. They language was bodily and through the drawing.

B 6: They developed and transformed the drawing as a group, as they moved around. It is a result of collaboration, input and spontaneity.

B 7: Developed on each other's work. They all use the entire space. First imitating, then become more independent.

B 8: Both the lines and the persons were in flow. A collaboration that was characterised by each individual.

B 20: It was a large space to evolve in. I saw: involvement, creativity, flow, concentration, empathy, and collaboration. They used their whole body to work with.

Many of the students watching us drawing expressed their desire to join us. As well as the wish to bring this further in the kindergarten:

B11: Nice to watch such cooperation. I wanted to participate too.

B 4: I wanted to participate too. I wanted to grab a charcoal and draw, continue on other's patterns and develop it further. It was peaceful to watch; 10 minutes just flew.

B 6: Strong contact between the artist and the material. I want to participate too, by developing further the patterns and using my feet to draw with, by dragging them in different directions.

B 10: It was nice, calm, and enjoyable to watch. They created something very special on the paper without verbal communication. I felt many times the desire to grab a charcoal and be creative, because it looked so good to be in a creative process. It inspired me to my own praxis.

B 11: An unknown process, nobody set limits/framework on how it had to be. Inspiring, and I want to do the same with my kids in the kindergarten.

B 12: I notice my own desire to participate, it looked so joyful.

B 16: I could see the possibilities on how to draw further. The more I saw the more I wanted to participate. I imagined how to draw further. Exciting to see how things went from a form to another and suddenly become something else. I saw the possibilities charcoal has: large, thin, weak, or strong. B3: Was focused on the process. This is something I wish to try in the kindergarten. B7: I experienced this as a joyful experience. It was possible to use fantasy and creativity. Nice to do with children that do not like to draw.

B 9: They get quickly in in flow. It was calm and quiet; everybody was in his/her own world. I did the same with children in my kindergarten, with children that usually do not like to draw. They were excited and loved what we did. I understood that was a way to invite children that do not like to sit down and draw. The children came rapidly into a creative world and enjoyed it.

This exercise was without any musical accompaniment, but the musicality of the process itself—the sounds of the charcoal sliding on the paper and of feet and bodies in motion—was occasionally mentioned:

B 5: It seemed like they were in flow. Collaboration between them. I remember very well the sounds; it was almost like a meditation. They draw with the entire self and become immersed in what they did.

B 15: It was very silent and we could hear the sound of the charcoal. It was fascinating to see the lines and the curves transforming into different patterns.

B 18: Exciting to see how the patterns progressed. It was magical with the silence that occurred. It was a good flow and collaboration. Silence and movements became art. Combining dance and colours.

Reflections on Students' Written Reflections

Teaching in its traditional classroom sense is generally understood as imparting information or skills from one (an instructor) who has the knowledge to those (learners) who do not. Higher goals in pedagogy

include engaging students actively in knowledge acquisition in a given subject area. Those goals, of course, are not always within reach, depending on the situation, subject, or interests, skills, or motivations of the teachers or students involved.

But the main purpose of the project discussed in this paper is achieving something maybe even more elusive: disclosing to students directly and experientially the value of the creative process itself. The drawing workshop described here embraces techniques from performance art, which works with the cultivation of unexpected experience, a blurring of boundaries between artist and observer, with its destabilizing of normal expectations about how, in this case, a classroom is spatially organized, how its time is ordered, and who is teaching and who is learning. As well, this teaching session immerses participants in a situation of artistic creativity, that emerges rather than from solitary self-withdrawing-in, but through collaborative engagement with its unexpected—and evolving—spatial, temporal, and formal qualities.

The data gained from this teaching session, in the form of the various video records and feedback from student participants and observers, suggests that at least in part the experiment succeeded. The line between participants and observers blurred, with students feeling enveloped within a creative unfolding that compelled their attention and commitment. Feedback comments often showed emotional charge beyond merely neutral analysis. Some of those more peripheral (observing with cameras) yearned to get closer to the performative drawing's centre of action, down on the floor. Some of those who were at the centre reported feeling that they were suddenly thrust outside of who they normally were—in terms of role, bodily motions and expressivity habitual in a classroom, constraints of style—and were acting now as artists. Citations from feedback in this article, as well as others in my archive, are testimony of intense experiences *in situ*.

Student commitment is something I have often discuss with my colleagues. Our goal is to minimize the distance between the students and the act of drawing, performing, or singing. By creating a collaborative field of creativity, lines normally divide were to some degree blurred in the flow of the unfolding performative process.

While this paper describes a classroom workshop at a university college among students of ECE, the aim is to expose and inspire kindergarten practitioners to performative drawing, immerse them in an experience, and help them see potential in drawing and way of integrating aesthetic pedagogy, a goal of Norway's newly carved-out area of knowledge of Art, Culture, and Creativity in early childhood education.

Conclusion

Initiating ECE students in innovative ideas—here, some from contemporary art—can contribute to an evolving praxis in kindergartens. Drawing as an activity spans a social range from individuals acting alone to collective collaboration, but information from my students working in Norwegian kindergarten indicates that drawing skews toward the solitary activity that is usually attempted at a scale no larger than a piece of A4 paper. Performative drawing is a playful way to communicate with others: through bodily movements, improvisation, and cooperation while evolving two-dimensional forms in a shared space. The preschool teacher can intervene in the organisation of the space to create an inviting domain for playing together (adults and children, as well as children with children), in a spacious and space-

transforming area that enables the creative forms to unfold freely with the engagement of participants' own bodies and in ways open to inclusion of musicality and bodily approach.

When playing and drawing are used in these collaborative, socially-connecting ways, a rich space is created in which can be realized international ideals expressed in key governing documents seeking to ensure children's flourishing by valuing and recognising the child's desire, intentions, and interests. Performative drawing is a practice that embodies spirit—and can further develop the practice—of recent Norwegian pedagogical reforms aimed at creating in ECE a unified subject area of Art, Culture, and Creativity.

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