

Using the phenomenology of artistic practice to explore and compare teaching

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Göran Krantz

Uddannelsescenter Marjatta, Denmark

Abstract

The act of teaching is constituted by tensions between contradictory influences of national educational systems, teachers' professional/personal identity, cultural and social values. Qualitative research methods can explore this complex situation. Indeed, narrative methods have explored teachers' 'life histories'. This article provides a review of the development, design and usefulness of a new qualitative method, *Phenomenology of Artistic Practice* (PAP). It focuses on the act of performative movement. It has been successful in the exploration of students' experiences of dance. PAP uses performative movement, poetry and picture in a comparative process to create a 'third space' in which the dynamic quality of experience emerging from practice can be explored. Perspectives on the nature of experience discussed by Dewey, Vygotsky and Merleau-Ponty are included. It is argued that PAP can be useful in comparative international pedagogy because it can explore how teachers' experience, and their practice, can help them the complex factors that influence the act of teaching.

Keywords

Phenomenology, arts-based-research, third space, comparative research, act of teaching, self-exploration

Introduction

The instrumental search for the best teaching methods in Europe is contested because it is not easy to apply an approach to teaching that is successful in one country to another. Countries educational systems are embedded in complex cultural and social contexts (Kelly, 2013). Therefore, important factors are missing in context neutral perspectives assumed by instrumental approaches to education which are insensitive to cultural diversity (Meyer and Benavot, 2013). This highlights the task for international comparative research in education to explore culturally-based value systems and teaching methods. These can be explored through comparison, thus contributing to developing a broader understanding of differences in national educational systems (Alexander, 2000, 2001, 2009). In one comparative study, Osborn et al. (1997) found that the priorities teachers held for their actual teaching, where external demands, social and cultural influences mixed, were often influenced by local traditions and culture. In the act of teaching, teachers' own value systems and

Corresponding author:

Göran Krantz, Uddannelsescenter Marjatta, Strandvejen 11, Tappernøje, DK-4733, Denmark.
Email: ugk@marjatta.dk

professional identities are mixed with sociopolitical and cultural demands. As Kelly summarizes: 'This comparative work and similar studies have highlighted the influence national and local cultures and teacher identities have on their professional practice, how teachers mediate external directives and the sense teachers make of their work' (2013: 416). In the act of teaching, these influences meet and here the teacher articulates her/his way of teaching. To research teachers' ways of teaching, therefore, a method is needed that can explore the act of teaching, situated within these complex circumstances. In a study comparing educational systems in seven countries, Goodson and Lindblad (2011) used different methods to explore how national policies and the professional life of the teacher influence teaching. The professional life includes the teachers' own points of view and important values, often drawn from their previous experiences. Goodson and Lindblad show that the 'life histories' of the teacher are an important part of a comparative research design. Transforming professional experiences into words, narrative, stories enhances the understanding of their own position and role as teacher. This perspective can open up questions regarding professional identity such as, what is important for me in teaching?

Pedagogy relates to the act of teaching and the ideas and contexts that inform it (Alexander, 2001). Drawing on Bernstein and Gee, Kelly argues that discourses on pedagogy concern 'more than cultural texts and meanings of ideology, or of body of knowledge, argument and evidence in which teaching is embedded. It is also manifest as both explicit and implicit ways of being' (2013: 417). Institutional demands, workplace cultures, social and professional identities influence these ways of being. The act of teaching, the core of teachers' professional identity, is a contested situation. 'Different influences may be in contradiction or outright in conflict with each other; living with and wherever possible reconciling such tensions is central to many teachers day to day experience' (Kelly, 2013: 419).

Discussing how different cultural contexts meet and develop new hybrids, Bhabha (1996) argues that cultural identity is developed in a dynamic and creative 'third space', placed at the meeting point, in-between different cultural and social identities. Each person is a hybrid and through forming a unique set of contradictory factors, cultural identity is established. Drawing on Bakhtin, Kelly argues that this is a space where different points of view collide, create tensions and new possibilities are found that 'provides opportunities to further explore differences' (2014: 14). This perspective can be applied to comparative international research. Collaboration between international teams can establish a 'third space' and allow for multiple positions to emerge (Rutherford, 1990). Alexander argues that the aim of comparative research is 'to make the familiar strange' (2000: 27). One way of doing this is to focus research on 'third spaces', moments of action where contradictory influences clash and new views and ways of being are developed. However, here research methods are needed that can make the familiar strange and explore new possibilities, embedded in the experiences of the teacher, in the act of teaching.

From a methodological perspective, Leavy (2009) highlights the potentials for 'third space' when discussing Arts Based Research (ABR). Leavy gives examples on how research using music and drama can explore the 'third space' in different ways. She also refers to a study that explored the experiences of two artists that expressed the same theme in picture and poetry (Sava and Nuutinen, 2003). In the dialogue between the two artists, different points of view collided and new perspectives emerged. A 'third space' was established. Sava and Nuutinen argue that this dialogue is a possibility to transform the experience and to expand the possible languages to express it. They see this 'third space' as:

strongly experimental, sensory, multi-interpretative, like a fleeting shadow, intuitive and ever changing... must accept borderline existence of the two or more worlds, the meeting place as a mixed stream of fluids,

as something multi-layered, not known, always to be created anew, as a field of many understandings. (2003: 532, italics in original)

Here dialogue and comparison between different contradictory perspectives open up new points of view.

This article discusses a qualitative research method, *Phenomenology of Artistic Practice* (PAP), developed to explore students' experience of performative movement, dance (Krantz, 2015). The epistemological context of PAP is Hermeneutic Phenomenology (HP) and it is influenced by ABR. The context and findings of this study (Krantz, 2015) are considered later, but students were asked to express why dance is important to them in a performative movement, picture and poem. Following this, an interview based on comparative interpretations of the artistic representations of their experiences resulted in verbal descriptions. Results show that students developed: an understanding of self and ways of being; an understanding of the activity they are in, dance; and an understanding of the relationship between their own activity/experience and wider social and cultural contexts. Data from this project indicated that PAP enhanced participants' explorations of identity in professional situations. I argue that these results point in a direction that can be useful in qualitative studies on comparative pedagogy in an international context. It is in this light that this article reviews this method and discusses these findings, and on the basis of this study with dance performance students I argue this method is suitable for exploring teaching.

The complexity of teachers' professional identities, where different perspectives clash and have to be re-constructed in the performative act of teaching, call for methods that can investigate these situated experiences. PAP can contribute to this. The epistemological approach to HP with focus on the exploration of lived experiences in complex situations in life is relevant to explore experience in practice. Krantz's (2015) work with performance students shows that the comparative elements in PAP enhance and allow multiple experiences, often of a contradictory nature, to be considered, thus opening a 'third space', where it is possible to see something anew. Therefore, PAP can be a tool to explore the complex interaction between perspectives, intentions and individual meanings that constitute the act of teaching. In cross-cultural studies, one might assume that PAP can give qualified data that make comparison between individuals as well as between cultural contexts possible in new ways. There is a lack of qualitative research in comparative international education and a lack of methods that can explore the complex situation in which the act of teaching is embedded. The aim of this article is to point out that PAP can contribute towards filling this gap in knowledge.

In the following sections, the theoretical and methodological contexts of PAP are discussed first. Then perspectives that influenced the development of PAP are reviewed.

Theoretical framework

PAP aims at an exploration of the lived experience of performative movement. This places the study in the phenomenological context. Phenomenological inquiry is a powerful way for 'understanding subjective experience, gaining insights into people's motivations and actions, and cutting through the clutter of taken-for-granted assumptions and conventional wisdom' (Lester in Butler-Kisber, 2010: 51). The focus on lived experience in lived situations helps phenomenological research methods explore the richness and ambiguity of existence: 'The magic comes when we see ordinary, taken-for-granted living as something more layered, more nuanced, more unexpected and as potentially transformative; when something is revealed of the *extraordinary*' (Finlay, 2012: 33, italics in original).

Interpretation is important in PAP because the students themselves did interpretations of their lived experience in a variety of ways and reflected on their interpretations. The researcher, then, interpreted their interpretations. This places PAP in HP because the researcher makes 'an interpretation of the meaning of the lived experience' (Creswell, 2007: 59). Heidegger (2010) gives the philosophical basis of HP. His fundamental argument is that we cannot step out of the situation in which we exist. Being-in the world and being-in time are concepts he uses for the process of existing, and interpretation is part of how we are situated in the world. We are not outside the situation but *in* it, and being *in* it we encounter the world: 'This being which we ourselves in each case are and which includes inquiry among the possibilities of its being, we formulate terminologically as *Dasein*' (2010: 7). This basic awareness of being is connected to ways of understanding, the questioning of being, which can lead to an understanding of being. The way to get access to *Dasein* must 'be chosen in such a way that this being can show itself for itself on its own terms' (2010: 16). Heidegger argues that a direct showing of a phenomenon is possible only through something, through an activity. The experience of *Dasein* is thus always mediated through something. Heidegger analyses different being-in: being-in the world, being-in as such, and being-in time. Being-in is described as ways of being. Van Manen summarizes Heidegger's position: 'Heidegger says that we are always already practically engaged in the context of life. For Heidegger the origin of meaning is not found in some primal realm but right here in our actions and in the tactile things in the world that we inhabit' (Van Manen, 2007: 17). Charles Taylor highlights the importance of Heidegger's work because it 'helped us to free us from the grip or rationalism' (1993: 317). Heidegger's ideas about truth, as situated and possible to attain through a dialogic, interpretative activity, are radically different from conceptual, rational understanding. For him, truth appears in situations, in activities. The epistemological question on how to attain truth is answered by the fundamental claim that the basic mode of existence is to question and explore the lived situation. Heidegger (2006) discusses the question of interpretation of existence in relation to the arts. He argues that the arts are activities, ways of revealing truth because they mediate existence and reveal core elements of existence. The artworks are thus a core element in understanding the existential dimension of a culture. In poetry, Heidegger (2006) sees the highest potential for revealing the truth.

Gadamer (1993) developed Heidegger's thoughts. He argues that the experience of a work of art is a truth that is contrary to the rationalistic concept of truth. This: 'constitutes the philosophic importance of art, which asserts itself against all attempts to rationalize it away. Hence together with the experience of philosophy, the experience of art is the most insistent admonition to scientific consciousness to acknowledge its own limits' (1993: xxiii). With this, Gadamer positions himself against methods of natural science and rationalism. He also positions himself against the existence of pure perceptions: 'Pure seeing and pure hearing are dogmatic abstractions that artificially reduce phenomena. Perception always includes meaning' (1993: 92). His main argument against these positions is that they distract our attention from our being-in the world, being-in time. Truth is revealed when we interpret situations where we encounter something that appears before us. Gadamer (1993), therefore, examines the ability to interpret and argues that understanding itself is of a dialogical nature. This means that interpretation is fused with linguistic, cultural, historical and social prejudices. He argues that it is not possible to bracket out these prejudices because they are part of our understanding. However, in dialogue, through encounter and factual meeting with something different, we can become aware of our biases. Gadamer rejects the idea of fixed methods of research in the humanities. Meaning is always under construction and: 'Hermeneutics is an *art* and not a mechanical process. Thus it brings its work, understanding, to completion like a work of art' (1993: 191, italics in original). If a rational process is a linear process from one object to another, from uncertainty to objective truth, Gadamer argues that a hermeneutical process moves

in circles from questioning to interpretation to understanding to new questions. The aim is to open new horizons of understanding. Gadamer uses Heidegger's concept of the hermeneutic circle and argues that in interpretation meaning is revealed 'in the oscillating movement between whole and part' (1993: 191). Gadamer clarifies that when Heidegger introduced the circular structure of understanding, he derived it from 'the temporality of Dasein' (1993: 266) and Gadamer argues that this way of understanding can correct and refine 'the way in which constantly exercised understanding understands itself' (1993: 266). It is a process in time. In time, we never return to the same moment although we might return to situations that look the same. The circle is thus a process of returning to oneself, being-in specific situations; it is a movement. The aim is to understand understanding. The phenomenological return to the things themselves, to the concrete, lived human experience, is the facticity that Gadamer built upon when discussing methods. The ontological underpinning of HP rests on Heidegger's conception of truth. Truth in the human sciences is revealed in processes of understanding. No fixed methodological knowledge can attain this. The method is to *be in* the experience, return to it. The method is to live with questions that make a dialogue with the world possible.

These philosophical perspectives constitute the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of PAP. I argue that they are relevant to exploration of educational situations in international contexts and relevant for exploration of 'third spaces' where different influences interact, collide and need to be understood. The aim of PAP is to explore meanings created in the process of expressing why something is important to life: mediated by performative movement, writing a poem and drawing a picture. PAP is a process of enhancing the possibilities to interpret and express created understanding in verbalized form. These aims stay close to the ontological and epistemological background of HP.

Critique of theoretical framework

Gadamer's philosophical approach has met critique. Moran argues: 'his stress on human linguisticity can be seen as a kind of linguistic idealism, and his embrace of historical relativism may also be a significant weakness in his philosophy' (2000: 286). Researchers working with hermeneutics, Hirsch (1967) and Betti (in Moran, 2000), argue that Gadamer is imprecise in interpretations and not critically aware of how to evaluate an interpretation. Moran argues that Gadamer's focus on the interpretative process weakens the correctness, thus, he is less interested in 'measuring truth against falsity' (Moran, 2000: 284). From a recent position, Kemp summarizes the critique on Gadamer and focuses on the critique that Habermas developed: 'Gadamer's mistake was to make the historical-hermeneutic interest universal' (Kemp, 2011: 205). This made Gadamer accept given western historical-cultural views as valid. However, power positions are strong in society and they influence social relations thus: 'the critique of ideology must be superior to hermeneutics' (Kemp, 2011: 205). Both postmodern criticisms (Løvlie and Standish, 2002) and postcolonial perspectives that acknowledge the relative value of all cultures (Jonsson, 2010) have deconstructed the Western humanistic paradigm. The situation for an individual today is thus a world-citizen perspective (Kemp, 2011) in which the task is to encounter and judge a variety of cultural perspectives. In a posthuman context, traditional humanistic values and a trust in reason are replaced by the awareness that man cannot be seen, principally, as the centre of the world but as an entity living in relationship to other living creatures and technical creations. Wolfe (2010) points out that one aspect of this is to see the human condition as a living system that relies on self-organization where relations and communication between the parts make a whole. Focus changes from essentialism or instrumental understanding to what happens 'in between', in the relationships in specific situations. The view that communicative interactions replace essentialism has influenced the discussion

on education in a direction where interpretation of lived experiences in action-oriented situations is seen as the core of education (Davey, 2012). The critique on ABR is similar to the critique of HP. It focuses on the idea that the interpretative process of research can move in a direction that creates falsification and claims are made that the basic ideas do not take postmodern and posthuman thought into consideration (Jagodzinski and Wallin, 2013).

I agree with this critique and will reflect on it later. However, my argument is that the use of the arts as embodied activities within HP can meet posthuman needs to find methods that focus on an exploration of relations and networks of relations in a specific, real situation.

Theorizing the nature of lived experience and practice

In the following, a description of two perspectives that influenced the development of PAP is provided: the nature of lived experience and exploring practice.

The nature of lived experience

For Dewey (1938) experience is the main factor in life, thus he argues that it is the central issue in education. Dewey (1934) maintains that experience is constituted of different dynamic and vital energies. The task when exploring experience is thus to explore the relations between the dynamic constituent parts of a unitary whole that originates in perception:

An experience has a unity that gives it its name, *that* meal, storm, that rupture of friendship. The existence of this unity is constituted by a single *quality* that pervades the entire experience in spite of the variation of its constituent parts. This unity is neither emotional, practical, nor intellectual, for these terms name distinctions that reflection can make within it. (1934: 38, italics in original)

Dewey describes the experience as a unity. It is specific, here and now. Reflection can find different perspectives on the experience: emotional, intellectual or practical. However, the unity is always more than one perspective that can be drawn out of it. This whole consists of a particular way of active interaction with the perceived objects. Dewey names this activity, *organization* of energies. Vital energies, contradictory tendencies are organized into a perceived whole: 'For nothing enters experience bald and unaccompanied... Its very entrance is the beginning of a complex interaction; upon the nature of this interaction depends the character of the thing as finally experienced' (1934: 168). Dewey argues that the activity of the self in an encounter with perception is a matter of rhythm. His short definition of rhythm is: 'ordered variation of changes' (1934: 160). One important factor in the activity of the self is that our purpose directs our attention towards a specific end. Thus, to be able to cope with the complex nature of experience, the intentions must have an open character and that means that the self can change the purpose constantly – can change direction in the perception. However, shifts in attention happen within the experience and are a part of the experience of the perceived:

Attention must move, and, as it moves, parts, members, emerge from the background. And if attention moves in a unified direction instead of wandering, it is controlled by the pervading qualitative unity; attention is controlled *by* it because it operates within it. (1934: 199, italics in original)

A method that tries to capture experience should be aware of this complex nature of experience. The unitary, temporal nature of an experience can be approached if we are sensitive to what happens in the process of interacting with it. To be sensitive is to be able to move the attention, to be

aware of the rhythmic nature of how we encounter the experience, which is to engage in ordered variation of changes; to move between modalities. The arts especially produce strong experiences. Dewey (1934: 202) argues that what the experience of a work of art can achieve is that we are introduced to 'the deeper reality of the world in which we live in our ordinary experiences. We are carried out beyond ourselves to find ourselves'. Dewey describes the importance of lived experience of body movements. He was connected to Mathias Alexander who developed a technique known as the Alexander technique that heightens awareness and control of the body. Dewey reports that through the work with body movements, things he had known earlier, philosophical or psychological knowledge, 'changed into vital experiences, which gave a new meaning to knowledge of them' (Jackson, 1998: 138). Dewey experienced that all habits are present in every act, thus creating character. He had tremendous difficulties in following Alexander's teaching, however, he experienced: 'the great change in moral and mental attitude that takes place as proper co-ordinations are established' (Jackson, 1998: 139). I argue that this is a good example of the existential potential of the encounter and work with body movements. It is also an example of the complex nature of the experience of body movement and how it affects us on different levels. Notably, Dewey experienced this knowledge in a different way compared to philosophical or psychological knowledge. It is vital knowledge. When he managed to *be in* the movement, he experienced a great change. These experiences are existential, and Jackson (1998) claims that they were important for Dewey himself and his philosophy.

Dewey argues that an experience is a dialogue between a perception that involves different senses and the activity of the self. A method that tries to capture experience should be aware of this complex nature of experience. The unitary nature of an experience can be explored by being sensitive to what happens in the process of interacting with it. To be sensitive is to be able to move the attention, to be aware of the rhythmic nature of how we encounter the experience, to engage in ordered variation of changes; to move between modalities; and to move between different forms of reflecting on the experience. To *be in* the movement, *be in* the experience of a situation is the point of departure. These factors are basic to the design of PAP.

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty (1962) argues that the body 'is the meaningful core', and in it, 'we learn to know that union of essence and existence which we shall find in perception generally' (1962: 147). The body is the centre of the process of perception and experience. It influences how we experience, and it makes experience possible. Merleau-Ponty argues that experience is a unity built on multimodal perceptions. We see, hear and smell all at the same time, and these impressions are in the process of perception through the integration of our body merged into one experience. The embodied movement is, for him, the point of departure in exploring the lived experience. The lived meaning is found *in* the situation, *in* the process of the bodily expression of it. Merleau-Ponty discusses the unity, tension and double nature of lived experience using the example of touching something with the hand:

this can happen only if my hand while it is felt from within, is also accessible from without, itself tangible for my other hand, for example, if it takes its place among the things it touches, is in a sense one of them, opens finally upon a tangible being of which it is also a part. Through this crisscrossing within it of the touching and the tangible, its own movements incorporate themselves into the universe they interrogate, are recorded on the same map as it; the two systems applied upon one another, as the two halves of an orange. (1968: 133).

To be in the embodied movement makes it possible to crisscross between having attention on the touching or the touched, to be able to move constantly between the two. This constant dialogue constitutes the experience of my own activity. Merleau-Ponty (1962) argues that this is a process

that moves between attention and judgement and an internal dialogue based on the perception of the body. He argues that it is fundamental to human consciousness and that meaning is found in the interaction between the experience of the perceived and the expression of the experience. Experience is both perception and expression. Therefore, he argues: 'our body is comparable to a work of art. It is a nexus of living meaning, not the law for a certain number of covariant terms' (1962: 151). In an educational context, Merleau-Ponty (1962) highlights the importance of the embodied interaction between the child and parents and with other persons in the surroundings of the child. He sees the embodied movement as fundamental for knowledge of oneself and for self-recognition from early childhood through one's life.

These perspectives highlight that knowledge on experience rests on embodied movement. Important for PAP was:

1. to crisscross between to feel the body movement from inside and to experience it as something in the world;
2. to crisscross between attention and judgement.

Vygotsky argues that consciousness is a unity that consists of different components: a 'complex holistic system' (1986: 4–5). He identifies active components in this unity and compares consciousness with a word. In a word, meaning is created through 'a close amalgam' of thought and language. Therefore, it is not easy to tell if 'it is a phenomenon of speech or a phenomenon of thought' (1986: 212). Consciousness, where contradictory factors are active, can never be deconstructed while there is constant movement between the constituent parts of this whole. This process, this continual movement back and forth, is what Vygotsky calls the psychological unit. It is present in all conscious activities. He argues that the process-based relation of thought to word makes the development of thought possible: 'Thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them' (1986: 218). Thought finds its 'reality and form' through speech (1986: 218). Therefore, verbal descriptions are not conceptual statements coming from somewhere outside consciousness but are the result of a process. Thoughts are developed and constructed in the act of speaking. The process of creating meaning is mediated through an activity. This is basic to Vygotsky's educational ideas about mediated learning (Kozulin, 2003).

Basic elements in PAP – comparison, shifting attention, moving between action and judgement, to establish a process of interpretation, rhythmic encounter with the experience – are inspired by Dewey, Merleau-Ponty and Vygotsky.

Exploring practice

In PAP, activities in the arts are of importance. The arts are practices, performed and acted, in specific situations and thus a background to PAP is found in the works of Billet (2001) who articulates that knowledge is a process of learning from experience. Associative processes focusing on non-logical relationships and tacit knowledge that we carry into the interpretation are thus basic principles of knowing *with* or knowing *in* practice. In studies on apprenticeship, Lave (2011) gives examples on how a way of knowing and thinking is developed through practice embedded in social and cultural contexts. This challenges pure theoretical and rational approaches to research, which, she argues, can be hindrances to attaining knowledge. Knowledge based in practice can uncover deeper levels of the experience of individuals and is thus of major importance in developing identity (Holland et al., 1998). In an educational context, Van Manen (2007, 2014) points out *pathic knowing* is a new fundament for knowing. This knowing is based in practice. Whereas theory 'thinks' the world, practice 'grasps' the world (2007: 20). This grasping of the world is *pathic*. The

pathic refers ‘to the general mood, sensibility, sensuality and felt sense of being in the world’ (2007: 20). With this concept, Van Manen tries to capture the embodied, lived sense of being responsive to situations in life. He argues that this way of knowing is the major part of our experience: However, this is mostly overseen in research on education while it aims at cognitive outcomes. Van Manen maintains that we understand the world and discover what we know ‘in how we act and in what we can do’ (2007: 22). To know *in* is different from to know *of*. Van Manen accordingly argues that phenomenology today may more be seen as a practical reflective method on practice than a philosophy. It can be a way of being sensitive to practice thus it: ‘operates in the space of the formative relations between who we are and who we may become, between how we think or feel and how we act. These formative relations have pedagogical consequence for professional and everyday practical life’ (2007: 26). Here focus is on practical ways of handling situations and not on knowledge outside of this process.

These perspectives highlight the value of the experience of being active in a specific situation and thus underpin the basic ideas of PAP. The formative relation between who we are and who we may become is situated in the experience of how we think, feel and act in a specific situation.

In the following sections a description of PAP and information about participants and findings in the study using PAP (Krantz, 2015) are provided.

A study based on PAP with performance students

Twenty, 18-year-old, upper school students from two Swedish schools participated. National backgrounds are mixed. Nine students come from an upper school specializing in dance. Students come to this school in order to pursue a future as a professional dancer. Eleven students come from a Steiner-school, where dance is a regular part of the curriculum throughout the school. Students from this school that participated have a positive relation to dance but no professional ambitions. Interviews were conducted in school after scheduled school time. The question that invited them to participate was: Have you experienced dance as important for you?

In this study with performance students, first, participants were asked to express through performative movement their experiences of why dance is important for them. The next step was to express this experience of dance in a poem and a picture. It was up to participants to decide whether to do the poem or the picture first. To do these artistic expressions took between 25–45 minutes. All 20 students did all the tasks. Then an interview with the following questions was carried out.

1. Tell me about what you experienced when you did the movement.
2. Why is this experience important to you?
3. Is this experience important to your life?
4. Tell me about what you experienced when you did the picture/poem.
5. Why is this experience important to you?
6. Is this experience important to your life?
7. Tell me about what you experienced when you did the poem/picture.
8. Why is this experience important to you?
9. Is this experience important to your life?
10. Compare the picture and poem. Describe the differences and similarities. What do they express?
11. Compare the gesture and picture. Describe the differences and similarities. What do they express?
12. Compare the gesture and poem. Describe the differences and similarities. What do they express?

13. Was the process of doing movement, making a picture/poem, and discussing them important to you?
14. What does the picture/poem express?
15. What was the most important moment?
16. Do the movement again. Look at the picture and read the poem again, and if something new comes up, something you want to add, please do that.

Questions 1, 4 and 7 focus on the lived experience of the activity, not on students' experiences of dance in general. To avoid conceptual answers (Finlay, 2012) and to stay close to the activity of doing the expressions is the aim of the first question. The question 'Why is this experience of importance to you?' focuses on the experience and explores the meaningfulness of it. The question 'Is this experience of importance to your life?' puts focus on the experience again and allows reflection on the meaning of the experience in a broader, life-world context. Questions that focus back on the experience again through a comparison of the different artistic representations then followed. The last part of the interview included questions exploring the importance of the whole process. These questions evaluated the method. One question asked what student experiences the picture and poem express. One question focuses on the most important moment in the whole process. This aims at identifying a specific moment that 'stands out for its vividness' (Van Manen, 1990: 65). Answering this question should make students reflect on the whole process by relating/comparing the parts to the whole.

The lived experiences of dance performance students

The analysis of the findings is based on the transcripts of the interviews and the taped interviews. All 20 students performed a dance, wrote a poem and drew a picture. In HP, the analysis of results is a process of revealing meanings hidden in a text or in statements about a lived experience (Finlay, 2012; Lavery, 2003). The basic notion is that narratives of different kinds are needed to express it. Through a structural analysis of a text or a narrative, a widened understanding of the experience can be revealed. Following the thematic analysis of Van Manen (1990) themes were identified. Here the themes related to the first two questions are presented: to describe the experience and why it is of importance for the student. All text that does not directly focus on the experience is excluded. Students are identified through letters. The students experience the following.

- *To feel secure and be able to rest in oneself.*
- *To feel strong, complete, and authentic.*
- *To feel well.*
- *To become calm and less strained in life.*
- *To experience freedom, relaxation, happiness and hope.*
- *To develop as a person.*

These themes express positive experiences of self.

Answers to the question about the importance of the experience of dance in life are summarized in the following seven themes.

- *To open up new horizons in life and think new thoughts.*
- *To strengthen endurance and concentration.*
- *To have a secure centre, a home in life.*
- *To get a wider understanding of what one can do in life and how to find one's own way through life.*
- *To learn how to handle situations and feelings in a way that can be useful in life.*

- *To work on oneself and solve problems or questions in real life.*
- *To get power and motivation to fight for things in life.*

These themes substantiate the claim that the findings give evidence of the positive influence the experiences of dance have on the students and their lives. Earlier research has highlighted this (Bond and Stinson, 2000/2001) and these findings expand our knowledge on this. The findings give rich data to use in a discussion on the value of dance in contemporary educational contexts, highlighting existential values such as self-exploration, motivation for life, development of positive self-image and understanding of their position in life. However, the focus of this article is on the method.

In student evaluations of PAP, three themes were identified. In order to keep a direct relation to the findings, students' statements are included with each theme.

1. To reflect on the experience in this way makes the experience much clearer and gives a deepened understanding of it.
'It became clearer what it is and what it does' (Student J). 'It is when one describes and tries to explain it . . . only then, one can sort out all the feelings and thoughts on what one thinks about it, inside oneself' (Student T).
2. To use different types of expression enhances the ability to explore and express the experience.
'It obviously becomes stronger when one can express it in other ways' (Student M). 'It is pleasant to try to express oneself through different expressions, picture, and text but with the same experience while then everything gets stronger than it was before' (Student E).
3. The process makes students deepen their understanding of why dance is important and meaningful for them. To reflect on the experience this way deepens the understanding of the importance of dance.
'It feels important to deepen why we do it and what I get out of it. I am digging in myself and experience what it is for me and this is the most important thing to carry with me' (Student M). 'Through understanding why one is doing it and why one likes it and what the meaning of it is, then one can improve it . . . It is a help to understand why one is so passionate about it . . . When one knows why one does it, one does not need to doubt it' (Student S).

The themes and these quotes substantiate that the students find that PAP makes it possible to arrive at a deepened understanding of the lived experience of dance. An argument to consider is that many forms of interviews aim to develop and verbalize new understanding about a specific experience through a process that is more or less open and influenced by the situation (Kvale, 1983, 1996). Like most interviews, this interview is a process of getting a clearer and clearer picture of what is important. What stands out is that the findings show that the interpretation of the artistic activity is important, which confirms that when description is 'mediated by expression it seems to contain a stronger element of interpretation' (Van Manen, 1990: 25).

The evaluation shows that the students, through PAP, deepen their understanding of why dance is important and meaningful for them and the meaningfulness of their experience of dance in their social and cultural context. They argue that they learn about themselves. The artistic activities make it possible to view and compare the experience of their own activity in a multitude of ways. This moves the perspective towards 'formative relations between being and acting, between who we are and how we act' (Van Manen, 2007: 13). Van Manen (2014) maintains that to explore these relations moves phenomenology away from theory towards practice. Practice, seen from this perspective, is not only what I do or what happens but also what happens to me and what forms me

when doing it. PAP includes the artistic activity both in the practical process and in the process of interpretation.

PAP focuses on interpretations of the experience of a dance movement that expresses why dance is important to the student. This makes it very specific. The students are all of the same age thus limiting the study. Given the participants' age, questions on identity and future life course are important issues, and these issues influence the study. All participants had a relationship with dance because they had experienced something important to them while doing dance. This makes them biased. The timeframe, in some cases, restricted the interview. Some students said, by end of the interview, that it would have been interesting to do the process again. The curiosity underlying such a statement reveals trust in the process of creating meaning and that further exploration is possible. This indicates that it would have been better to have a flexible timeframe. The researcher influenced the study both as interviewer and as an interpreter the findings. The analysis of the themes was rewarding, but it also limited the view on the findings. Staying close to the verbal statements of the students in the analysis of the findings revealed the experience in specific situations. It would have been possible to analyse findings using different lenses that would have opened up further perspectives on the findings. The critique of HP and ABR also applies to PAP. In the process of finding words students might lose the direct connection to the experience of movement and a play on words develops. This is the weakness of PAP. However, the returning evaluations and comparisons of the factual artworks in most cases help in keeping focus and establishing a process where the meanings of words are made clear. Student J is an example. J's first answer was: 'I feel relaxed'. When evaluating the picture J delivered a most detailed description of how the movement made it possible to overcome strain, feelings of being a failure and contradictory tendencies in herself. After that a reflection on J's difficult life situation arose. The words 'I feel relaxed' now had transformed into a narrative in which J could discuss and understand her own situation. A 'third space' is created in which J can experience, understand and handle herself. This is the strength of PAP.

Perspectives on experience

One theme in the findings was *The experience of dance is built upon dynamic opposites that are active at the same time and interact with each other*. Students' descriptions of the experience of dance make it clear that it consists of opposites that are active at the same time and are in dynamic tension within the experience. Typical statements are: 'at the same time', 'it is both' or 'it is like opposites'. Different kinds of tensions can be identified.

- A spatial tension: 'It is both somehow concentrated but at the same time extremely spread out in all directions' (Student B).
- A dynamic tension: 'It is calm and power at the same time' (Student R). 'It is pleasant and calm but at the same time challenging' (Student T). 'The pressure in the heart that is both comfortable and at the same time so unpleasant' (Student L).
- A dynamic process: 'I experience this explosion of energy that again is concentrated' (Student F).
- Student L describes the experience like this: 'For me it was enormous many feelings. I did not know if I was happy or sad or like everything. It feels a little bit like this is the aim; it is this I want; this is what I want to achieve' (Student L).

These statements summarize different aspects of the experience. It is an experience of tension and, in this tension, one can find something new, something important. The aim is to come into this experience and be there, be in it; and the feelings give access to new perspectives. As Student

T notes: 'For those who not dance much, it might be difficult to think that the feelings are most important.' The expressions 'for me' or 'for those who' show that this is no objectified description of processes but a first person perspective of a situation being in a multitude of feelings all at the same time. It is not a pure subjective stance because it is an experience of something. It is not an essentialist approach seeking the essence of something within oneself. It is a situated experience of oneself that reveals a multitude of possibilities in the moment they are, as students say, 'when they 'happen'.

It is like to feel totally complete and at the same time totally lost; like if one is part of something big, one really feels magnificent. One is extremely big and extremely small at the same time. Like nothing and everything. Yes, something shifting. It is like a spectrum of colours and feelings. (Student A)

In this experience Student A finds, what she calls, 'authenticity'. This, and many other examples in the findings, provides data that open up for understanding the complex nature of experience that Dewey placed at the centre of education.

It could be seen as a contradiction that the students, when describing the nature of the experience of being in the dance, use words such as 'to be oneself', 'to be authentic', 'to be unique' and at the same time describe their experiences as very open situations full of tensions and possibilities. To be unique is not experienced as a closed autonomous self, resting in itself. Uniqueness is experienced in a specific and dynamic situation. The contradiction is not a contradiction if we understand that the perspectives the students have on their experience of self are dynamic. Explanations of self are not done in rational terms. Although some students said that dance is another way of thinking, I argue that the use of the word understanding is more appropriate. As Dewey (1934) argues, it is more about the structuring of energies and at the same time giving structure to oneself. It is more about actions. According to Dewey (1934), thinking or reflection is only one of many different ways of approaching the quality of an experience. Dewey's own experiences of movement made it clear that they are very strong, vital and include the totality of the human, including habits and moral impulses. To use the concept of thinking with regard to the understanding of an experience thus seems to me to exclude important aspects of the process of creating meaning. The following quote from C is typical of how the students used the word understanding: 'One feels more unified as [a] person and at the same time somehow full of nuances and one gets a bigger understanding for what one can do.' In adolescence, the understanding of self is a situation that is changing and demanding; it concerns issues in the identity of the young adult (Robins and Trzesniewski, 2005). Marcia argues that judgements to be made are embedded in situations of uncertainty, and the formulation of one's life course is the central issue (Marcia, 1980, 2010). What is at stake is the construction of a self-structure, 'an internal self-constructed dynamic organization of drives, abilities, beliefs, and individual history' (1980: 159). When discussing personal identity, Marcia argues that the most crucial area to study is 'the underlying process: the patterning of more or less disparate parts into a flexible unity' (1980: 159). The quote from Student C is one example of how PAP made exploration and development of a self-structure possible. I argue that these examples show that PAP is helpful when exploring the earlier discussed 'third space'. Findings contribute to an understanding of the complexity of experience and substantiate that PAP can deepen the understanding of the experience.

One theme from the evaluation of the method, *To use different types of expression enhances the ability to explore and express the experience*, points this out. To express one experience mediated through different artistic expressions, to compare these experiences one with another, to compare what is expressed in the artistic creations, to identify the most important moment and other activities PAP induces seems to make it possible to move in the experience, experience relations between

experiences and to identify what is important in it for the student. The use of different arts in PAP affords possibilities for the students to experience themselves in different ways. In the process of interpretation, the different arts play different roles. Findings provide evidence that the picture and the poem give specific contributions to this process. The picture expresses feelings and the poem is more concrete but also expresses a deeper level of the experience. One should consider that this might be because the origin of the picture is the experience of the dance, or the method affects the responses of the students. To note is that when students are answering the questions on what the picture and poem express, they often use terms like ‘this is more like’ or ‘that one is less’ before finding the final answer. Comparing thus helps to put the experiences into words, but it also influences their interpretation. One possibility is that they, in this comparative process, see the differences of the poem and picture more clearly. Another possibility is as both the picture and the poem are expressions of their own experience of dance, they see more clearly how this is represented differently in the other arts. Sava and Nuutinen (2003) argue that it is possible to transform the experience, to expand the possible languages to express it, to establish a ‘third space’ in a dialogue between creators of picture and poetry. PAP develops an internal dialogue in one person accomplished through the comparison between experiences of different artistic expressions of one experience. It establishes a ‘third space’ in the student’s experience where new meanings are created. Communicative interactions organized by the students themselves create a context of experiences in which it is possible to experience and explore self. The focus is on understanding relations between experiences in oneself. This can be placed in a post-human perspective where the human condition is seen as a self-organized system where relations and communication between the parts make a whole (Wolfe, 2010). The focus is on what happens ‘in between’, in relationships in specific situations.

The relevance of using PAP in educational contexts

Student A concluded her evaluation of PAP with a strong suggestion: PAP should be a regular part of the curriculum in upper school. It enhanced A’s understanding of self and her understanding of the social and cultural context that A is in. A used ‘authenticity’ to summarize this. Results from two pilot studies, in which adult participants explored their life/professional situation using PAP, show that they found PAP helpful in deepening the understanding of themselves, their professional activity and how they place themselves in social/professional contexts. In summary, the findings show that PAP helped to explore and improve understanding of ways of being, of self, and for understanding positions within social, professional and cultural contexts. With this as background, I argue that PAP can be a contribution to the problem of finding appropriate qualitative research methods to explore the act of teaching, especially in an international comparative context. There is a lack of such studies. Each act of teaching takes place in a situation full of tensions between different influences; it is a ‘third space’, a complex, existential situation, including points of views from different layers of life, an interaction between perspectives, intentions and individual meanings. PAP is a method designed to explore ‘third spaces’ and identify values and ways of being.

The examples above of how students describe themselves *being in* and how they handle the complex nature of experiences add to Dewey’s concept of experience. Dewey argues that it is possible to explore oneself in the experience, especially in experiences of the arts. Therefore, handling the ‘vital energies’ in the experience is for Dewey the central task for education. PAP’s point of departure is the embodied expression of something of vital importance to the participant – it is an embodied, performative act in a specific situation. Dewey became connected to the deepest values in himself when *being in* the body movement. Experiencing *being in* the embodied act opens it up for tacit knowledge and thus connects to deep values in oneself; something Merleau-Ponty points out. In PAP the three different arts capture different aspects of this experience and the comparison

between these experiences helps participants to construct something out of contradictory tendencies; Marcia argues the aim is to identify ‘a flexible unit’. This underpins the assertion that PAP could contribute to an exploration of teachers’ professional identities and how social, national and cultural influences are negotiated and influence teaching practice in specific contexts. In cross-cultural studies, one might assume that PAP can give qualified data that make comparison between individuals as well as between cultural contexts possible in new ways. There is a lack of qualitative research methods that can explore the complex situation in which the act of teaching is embedded. PAP is therefore a relevant tool for developing the complex understandings we need if we are to compare acts of teaching and learning in different cultural contexts.

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Author biography

Göran Krantz is leader of the 'Forskningsenhet for kunstnerisk aktivitet i pædagogisk praksis og uddannelse' [Research-unit for artistic activity in pedagogic practice and education] at Uddannelsescenter Marjatta, Denmark.