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How to Make a Performance Lecture? Exploring Metaphor as an Embodied Practice in Performative Research.

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This article reports a study on the process of creating three performance lectures. Anchored in arts-based research and using collaborative autoethnography as a methodological approach, the study describes the process of interpreting texts through improvisation, embodiment, and metaphorical concepts. The study aims to challenge reductionist epistemology in higher education by illuminating the possibilities of diversity encouraged by improvisation, embodiment, and metaphors. The following questions guided this study: What pedagogical and artistic patterns of diversity emerge in our process of creating the three performance lectures? And what metaphorical, bodily, and improvisational qualities are formulated in this process, and how can they contribute to an educational context? The results show that the pedagogical and artistic patterns of diversity emerge through the oscillation between textual content, improvisation, embodiment, metaphorical thinking, and theoretical analysis. The qualities being formulated are that metaphor emerges as a terrain where knowledge, experience, body, and language can meet and negotiate via improvisation, which are all elements contributing to an educational context. Investigating the hybridity of performance

and lecture makes tensions and gaps visible and therefore possible to process and negotiate. It also creates a possibility to bridge the pedagogical-self, artist-self and researcher-self.

Keywords: collaborative autoethnography, embodiment, improvisation, metaphor, performance lecture.

1 Introduction

As lecturers and researchers in the field of drama in teacher Education at Malmö University, we constantly encounter the question of how to integrate drama, the body, theory, research and experience into the educational context. Against the backdrop of critical perspectives of a reductionistic Education (Biesta, 2011; Biggs et al., 2011; Carlgren, 2015; Wickström, 2015), we find it important to illuminate and problematize the many layers of teaching and learning, particularly in today's rapidly changing society. Biesta (2011) criticizes the reduction of the concept of *education* to that of *learning*, which he attributes to the current educational focus on measurable outcomes. This study elucidates the importance of unmeasurable qualities within pedagogy by focusing on the *process* of creating three different performing lectures (PL), a hybrid form of performance and theoretical content in which artistic form is as important as the content. We build on our concerted knowledge of drama pedagogy, theory, and art where the practice is the principal research activity (Haseman, 2006). Grounded in arts-based research, we adopt a holistic approach to explore a knowledge-building process that merges an artist-scientist approach (Leavy, 2020). Therefore, this study is practice-driven rather than theory-driven. In particular, our research relates to what Haseman (2006) designates as “performative research”, which differs from quantitative and qualitative research in how it presents its findings. Namely, it reports findings in “presentational forms” where they “deploy symbolic data in the material forms of practice; forms of still and moving images; forms of music and sound; forms of live action and digital code” (Haseman, 2006, p. 102). To document and analyse our research material, we have utilized collaborative autoethnography, enabling us to combine our personal and collaborative experiences, notes and reflections (Ellis et al., 2011).

Our investigative process started in 2020, when Jimmy Offesson and Jessica Droppe interpreted and staged content from Anneli Einarsson's doctoral thesis to create a PL titled *A Metamorphic*

Dialogue with the Thesis “Drama as an Ecotone in the Ecosystem of Primary Education” (hereafter referred to as *The Ecotone*). It was first performed at a party celebrating Einarsson’s doctoral exams (2021); thereafter, Einarsson became involved in the PL, and it was performed at two different conferences, one in Malmö (2022) and one in Stockholm (2022). In our subsequent reflexive talks, we realized that our methodological way of working could be related to autoethnography, so we became interested in deepening our knowledge of this method. We created a second PL, *The Method*, where we took inspiration from two scientific articles and explored how collaborative autoethnography could be understood in our work. This PL was performed in a research seminar at Malmö University (2023), where we collected responses from the audience, and at a conference in Norway (2023). Subsequently, we received a request from the Swedish Council of Culture Schools (*Kulturskolerådet*) to create a PL based on a book that describes the history, development, and current practice in culture schools. This PL, *The Oasis*, was performed for the council’s staff and leadership at two different conferences, in Malmö and in Västerås (2024).

The three PLs gained interest from colleagues and audiences and inspired us to continue exploring what patterns of diversity emerged in our work and how they could contribute to the field of art in Education. The study describes the creation of the PLs as a three-part process: In *The Ecotone*, our exploration centres on metaphor as a concept; in *The Method*, we address questions of what constitutes embodiment when exploring a methodology; and in *The Oasis*, our exploration highlights improvisation as a key theme. Several other aspects could have been analysed, such as the fictional dimension or the function of artefacts as significant bearers of meaning, but our iterative, cyclical analysis revealed three key themes that merited further investigation: metaphor, embodiment and improvisation. The overarching questions of our study are:

- What pedagogical and artistic patterns of diversity emerge in our process of creating the three performance lectures?
- What metaphorical, bodily, and improvisational qualities are formulated in this process, and how can they contribute to an educational context?

We use the concept *pedagogical* in our overarching research question because we believe it contains teaching as well as learning and is on par with the concept *artistic*. Against the backdrop of a critical perspective on education, we report our interpretation of and place our practice-based study in arts-based research. Through a theoretical lens on metaphor, embodiment, and improvisation, we

investigate our process of creating three PLs. Further, we understand this article itself as performative and thereby part of our process.

1.1 A Reductionist Higher Education

The motivation for our investigation involves the critique of a reductionistic Education and what Carlgren (2015) referred to as “epistemological colonization”, which describes how theoretically assertive knowledge pervades higher Education and displaces other forms of knowledge, such as practical knowledge. It is attributed to the Western view of knowledge having historically been strongly influenced by Cartesian thinking and primarily linked to theoretical knowledge rather than practical experience (Carlgren, 2015). Similarly, Biesta (2011) claims that in a rationalist educational culture, diversity in forms of learning is disregarded in favour of “effective learning”. He goes so far as to say that art has almost disappeared from Education, and if it is present, it has been instrumentalized (Biesta, 2017). Wickström (2015) warns of the risks of a reductionist approach in higher Education, describing a development in which a limited number of pedagogical concepts and models have come to dominate the field and increasingly take the form of a conceptual canon, for example, constructive alignment.

Such a lack of diversity in Education can have detrimental effects with regard to democracy and quality. For instance, Adams and Owens (2016) underline the connection between democracy and Education through the arts by explaining that encouraging students to use creativity enables them to think differently, which inevitably creates tensions within a rationalist Education. The embodied (or corporeal) turn, in which the body is recognized and valued in learning processes, contributes to a paradigm shift from our traditional ways of thinking about knowledge and has profound implications for professional practice and Education (Loftus & Kinsella, 2021). Moreover, Sawyer (2011) criticizes the limitation of teachers’ autonomy in favour of increased standardization and scripted teaching. Recognizing that qualitative teaching involves well-thought-out structures, he argues for seeing improvisation as a resource in teaching. Specifically, Sawyer (2011) claims that improvisation, and thereby risk-taking, is at the core of any creative teaching and learning group experience within educational contexts.

1.2 *The Development of the Concept Performance Lecture*

Rather than referring to performance studies, our work is anchored in applied theatre and Augusto Boal's work, where social themes and societal questions are at the core. Applied theatre, developed during the 1970s, is a performance practice that falls outside mainstream theatre and often takes place in non-traditional settings with participants who may or may not be skilled in theatre arts (Prendergast & Saxton, 2016). According to Prentki and Preston (2009), "applied theatre defies any one definition and includes a multitude of intentions, aesthetic processes and transactions with its participants" (p. 11). In Boal's (2015) theatre work, subjects are interrogated and expressed through a wide variety of embodied expressions, and the audiences are seen as "spect-actors", actively contributing to the performance rather than passively observing it. Thus, applied theatre offers a way for us to broaden our knowledge and competence. In addition, it has many connections to our interpretation of the genre *performance lecture*.

The PL has lately gained prominence in Sweden, and Swedish television has featured multiple examples of well-known scientists collaborating with institutional theatres to stage their research. The concept is also practiced at Malmö University in the form of collaborations between artists and scientists at the university. These PLs involve scientists presenting their research while artists embody and perform it, and they are open to the public. Although interest in PL has been growing since the 1990s, the genre remains under-researched, and its definition is contested. It also lacks an established term and has been referred to as "lecture-performance" and "performative lecture" (Ladnar, 2013). In this study, we use the term "performance lecture" (PL) and draw our definition from Cerezo (2016), who describes it as "an important critical method within artistic research" due to its "hybrid and heterodox form" comprising both performative and discursive components. Its hybrid nature means the term can signify different things depending on whether the lecture or the performance elements are prioritized (Giménez Calpe, 2020). Accordingly, PLs vary widely in their creation and performance; as they relate to both academic and artistic domains, they generate a wide range of applications and interpretations. Due to this flexibility to accommodate various artistic strategies and academic themes, a strict definition would limit what the form might aim to achieve. Cerezo (2016) points out that many artists are drawn to this form because it is still open. The lack of a unified academic discourse means definitions often arise from the works themselves rather than from theoretical frameworks. This leads to an understanding of the PL that remains dynamic and context-dependent (Ladnar, 2013). We have chosen the term PL because lectures are

dominant in academic contexts and art is the gateway through which we chose to explore content. Further, we want to emphasize that PLs offer equal value in relation to other lecture forms.

2 Arts-Based Research and Collaborative Autoethnography

The knowledge field of drama pedagogy is multimodal and includes a plethora of practices, for example, bodily expression, dialogue, poetry, film, drawings and music – all of which are elements used in our PLs. At the same time, these modalities are methodological tools that can be used for material generation, analysis, and documentation (Haseman, 2006). In this practice-based study, we draw on arts-based research because it gives us the possibility to bridge our roles as teachers, artists and researchers (Leavy, 2009). Arts-based research offers researchers new pathways for creating knowledge from a range of epistemological and theoretical perspectives, but as it disrupts traditional research paradigms, it is inevitably a risk-taking practice (Leavy, 2009).

We were initially drawn to autoethnography due to its recognition of researchers' subjectivity, wherein researchers recount and analyse personal experiences and their implications within a cultural context (Lapadat, 2017). However, as Koeltzsch (2021) notes, the use of autoethnography produces a methodological obstacle: "describing-analysing-writing are actions related to 'intellectual' work through the 'head', with the result expressed in words", but "beyond the verbal and factual, there is the researcher's body and the self" (p. 1). We have seen this obstacle as an opportunity in this study to investigate what it means in our developing research in particular because it involves our perceptions of our bodies, our subjectivity, and interplay with each other. Given our three-person team's collaborative approach, we subsequently explored collaborative autoethnography (CAE) as a methodological extension. This method involves a community of researchers gathering autobiographical material and collectively analysing and interpreting it to reach a meaningful understanding (Chang et al., 2013). Miyahara and Fukao (2022) underline reflexivity as central to CAE, promoting both knowledge construction and researchers' professional development. Reflexive dialogue on the micro and macro levels enables researchers to develop new meanings and transformative experiences. Therefore, we approach CAE as a method where our personal and collective experiences, narratives, improvisations, and bodily expressions intertwine with a cyclical reflexivity to generate material for our analysis.

Arts-based research, such as ethno-drama, commonly involves analysing textual data (for example, interviews) and transforming them into a performative format (Leavy, 2020). The data in our PLs has consisted of a thesis (*The Ecotone*), two scientific articles (*The Method*) and a book (*The Oasis*). However, we have not processed them in a linear way or analysed them for dramaturgical purposes; rather, we have integrated them into the creative process, reading them individually and together. We did not write detailed manuscripts but carried out embodied improvisations and collected material from notes, drawings and mind maps made on paper and on the whiteboard throughout the PL-making process. Consequently, our performances are rooted in our embodied interplay rather than in manuscripts. This was a deliberate methodological approach to keep the research process alive and to challenge us to be open to questions, changes and relocations.

2.1 Ethical Consideration

Because arts-based research “disrupts traditional research” (Leavy, 2009), specific ethical considerations must be addressed regarding tensions in the process of balancing research practice and artistic practice. As in all research, the rationale for the study and the choice of methodology must make sense (Leavy, 2020). However, we agree with Adams and Owens (2021) that “we do not attempt to reconcile the jarring incongruities and paradoxes that are thrown up; instead, we accept the flow of things as they are” (p. 10). Importantly, the use of CAE has deepened our understanding of reflexivity by reinforcing the subjectivity of research. According to Lapadat (2017), “Reflexive researchers acknowledge that their own objectivity is a fiction and embrace the idea that any account they provide is a partial perspective as seen through their own point of view at a particular place and point in time” (p. 592). Moreover, Hernandez et al. (2017) point out that CAE is rooted in democratic processes where the researchers’ experiences are equally valued, so it requires vigilance concerning power imbalances, the unintentional silencing or favouring of voices and the temptation to rush into consensus. Therefore, when creating the three PLs, we considered ourselves as three equal colleagues, with no hierarchical positions. Having worked closely together at Malmö University for several years, we were aware of each other’s knowledge and competence as well as our work struggles. In addition, creating the PLs was new to all of us and somewhat outside our ordinary teaching practice, so we all started from the same baseline. Unlike traditional verbal presentations, performing for an audience creates a special form of vulnerability and poses risks on academic, artistic, and pedagogical levels. Nevertheless, we consider collaborative work in research as a strength in that the researchers do not take risks individually and can receive support

from colleagues with inside understanding of the work. Namely, CAE shifts from individual to a collective agency, providing support and preventing exploitation and misrepresentations (Lapadat, 2017).

2.2 *Material and Analysis*

During our process of creating three PLs, we gave ourselves individual assignments in preparation for our collaborative sessions. These assignments included reading texts and bringing suggestions for the performance, such as bodily expressions, practical ideas, or relevant theories and textual elements. The collaborative material included written notes, photographed bodily expressions, and mind maps drawn on paper and whiteboard. In addition, we created images with crayons, investigated different artefacts and recorded conversations. Our material also contains our experiences, memories and reflections from our encounters with audiences during the, in total, seven performances. The material chosen for analysis in the study can be divided into the following categories: personal logs, embodied memories, documented reflections, photographs of embodied expressions, mind maps and emails from the audience.

2.2.1 *The Ecotone*

The first PL was created by Jimmy Offesson and Jessica Droppe in 2020–2022 based on Anneli Einarsson's thesis *Drama as an Ecotone in the Ecosystem of Primary Education* (2020). The lecture is approximately 40 minutes long and was performed on three occasions (2022–2023): the first time by Offesson and Droppe, and the second and third time in collaboration with Einarsson.

2.2.2 *The Method*

The second PL was created by Droppe, Offesson and Einarsson and performed on two occasions by Droppe and Einarsson in 2023, each performance lasting approximately 15 minutes. The PL was inspired by the articles “The body as site of academic consciousness. A methodological approach for embodied (auto) ethnography” (Koeltzsch, 2021) and “Exploring the use of collaborative autoethnography as a tool for facilitating the development of researcher reflexivity” (Miyahara & Fukao, 2022).

In the seminar at Malmö University where we performed *The Method*, we sent a formal email to the members of the audience inviting them to send us their reflections. In doing so, they also consented to their reflections being used as material in our study. Six persons responded.

2.2.3 *The Oasis*

The third PL was created and performed in 2024 by Einarsson, Offesson and Droppe based on the book *Möjligheternas oas: från kommunal musikskola till kulturskola* (Röshammar & Sandh, 2023). The performance lasted for approximately 30 minutes.

Some of the material we documented can be described as what Koeltzsch (2021) terms “bodily experiences”, that is, bodily perceptions and memories combined with self-observation and social interaction. Through reflexivity, we commuted between focusing on ourselves, reading the texts, writing logs and poetry, recording conversations, and conducting collaborative practical work (Miyahara & Fukao, 2022). A challenge in collecting and analysing embodied work is that it takes place in a particular space and time and then it is gone. However, impressions are made through perception and memory during the performative research that create a new understanding which can be integrated into the process (Haseman, 2006; Koeltzsch, 2021).

2.3 *The Analysis Process*

The documentation and analysis process was carried out between 2020 and 2024, throughout which the material was continuously generated and organized (Chang et al., 2013). The ongoing organization of the diverse material provided an opportunity for the preliminary phases of the analysis to indicate “how the pieces fit together” (Chang et al., 2013, p. 96) and influenced the articulation of the results. Since every PL had been performed more than once, the performances themselves could be seen as a way of probing deeper into our experiences of how to make a PL and clarifying our individual and collaborative learning (Chang et al., 2013). From an arts-based perspective, our practices interacted with the ongoing reflexivity that took place internally for each of us and collaboratively between us in the process of understanding our own work. This movement between individual and collaborative reflexivity generated an objective awareness concerning our own thinking and experiences and a conceptual understanding of the work we developed (Miyahara & Fukao, 2022). The analysis itself alternated between individual and collaborative activities and was cyclical and iterative, and different interpretations were reconciled

in formal meetings. Notably, we see analysis and interpretation as integrated activities that contribute to discovering new performance elements and patterns (Chang et al., 2013). During this process, three themes emerged and inspired further investigation: metaphor, embodiment, and improvisation.

3 Theoretical Perspectives

3.1 *The Many-Layered Metaphor*

In Einarsson's doctoral project, which investigates how drama could be integrated into primary school teaching, Ricoeur's (1977) suggestion to use metaphors in a poetic rather than a rhetorical way became pivotal in the process. The term "ecotone",¹ borrowed from ecology (Smith & Smith, 2006), became an important metaphor in the struggle to transform embodied and volatile processes and expressions in the drama practice and to describe them in an academic text. The ecotone as a metaphor for drama practice became part of Einarsson's (2020) conceptual model for describing the educational ecology and its intrinsic tensions in primary school: Schooling-Ecotone-Art. "Schooling" describes a rationalistic discourse which tends to rely on a traditional view that separates mind and body and prioritizes logo-centric Education – an Education in which words, texts and language have a privileged position (Biesta, 2011; Selander & Kress, 2010). "Ecotone" describes an in-between space where the tensions between aesthetic and pedagogical practices occur, for example, when integrating drama practice into the Swedish subject. "Art" in the conceptual model stands for the artistic practice within Education that is prioritized over the curriculum (Einarsson, 2020). The development of the conceptual model (Schooling-Ecotone-Art) in the thesis unfolded a landscape of fruitful tensions that echoed into our work of creating PLs. In the initial phase of our study, we were inspired by Ricoeur's (1977) description of the creative potential of the metaphor as an encounter between different semantic fields that creates new meaning. He explains that "a metaphor holds two thoughts of different things together in simultaneous performance upon the stage of a word or a simple expression, whose meaning is the

¹ "Ecotone" denotes a wild, uncultivated habitat in nature, for example, a meadow between a farmland and a forest, and is at the same time a border between these habitats. Due to its borderline character, the ecotone experiences edge-effects in relation to the adjacent areas, which stimulate a diversity of species that subsequently characterize the ecotone (Smith & Smith, 2006).

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result of their interaction” (p. 92). Thus, the metaphor is a way of saying the unspeakable, opening possibilities and creating wonder. It can contribute to self-understanding and world-understanding, especially in poetic and existential contexts. Ricoeur’s (1977) perspective suggests that the metaphor offers an ontological opening and a possibility to change our way of being-in-the-world.

Elements and phases in creative processes are often difficult to put into words. Fels (2012) gives an example from a performative inquiry when using a metaphorical and poetic way to describe a moment of “a stop” in the process. Referencing “the stop” described by Appelbaum (1995), she develops the metaphor “a tug on the sleeve,” in which she refers to something that calls the practitioner to attention. By this, Fels visualizes the performative moment in a creative process that interrupts, disrupts, and encourages attentive researchers, educators, and learners to reimagine and reflect on their engagement. According to Fels (2012), if practitioners of performative inquiry pay attention to the “tug on the sleeve”, it can inform their understanding of how they encounter and engage relationally with others. They are required to listen deeply, be present in the moment, be aware of the stops that illuminate their practice, and reflect on their implications.

Our continuous analysis process led us to Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) conceptual metaphor theory, in which they argue that metaphors are not just a matter of language but a mechanism that permeates our everyday life. They oppose the Western philosophical tradition in which reason is separate from what we do with our bodies (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999); they claim that reason – what we experience and how we think and act – is fundamentally embodied. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (p. 5). That is, we understand abstract concepts through bodily-rooted experiences: The body’s positioning in space, movement, and experiences shape how metaphors are created and used, and “mental structures are intrinsically meaningful by virtue of their connection to our bodies and our embodied experience” (1999, p. 77). For example, the metaphor “time is money” is conceptualized by cultural and experiential categories like “you are wasting my time” or “he is living in borrowed time”. Therefore, Lakoff and Johnson see reason as imaginative in that embodied understanding is mapped through metaphors. Accordingly, we view the metaphors in our work of creating PLs as not only linguistic but also bodily, spatial, and performative. We see metaphors as an organizing force in creation, reflection and collaborative interplay. They can function both as tools for direction and understanding and as driving forces

for dislocation and creative questioning. Specifically, metaphors in this study serve not just a means of expression or a decoration but as a form of knowledge production.

3.2 *Embodiment*

In the theatre tradition and in teaching, the body has sometimes been reduced to an instrument of expression. However, discussions about the body have since the 1970s evolved in many fields, including sociology, cultural theory, feminism, theatre and pedagogy. The embodied turn in the humanities and social sciences has opened up a broader view of corporality (Loftus & Kinsella, 2021). Theatre performance practices place the body at the core of everything, although notions of the body can differ; for instance, Brecht's has a political view of the body, and Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the lived experience of the body. On the other hand, talking about "the body" may be misleading since every single body is shaped by its background, experiences, and awareness of itself. Gavan et al. (2007) note that:

the body is a product of social and historical modes; it is able to both read and respond to the environment around it. Consequently, this makes physical forms of representation an ideal mode through which to comment on and shape the world around us. (p. 166)

Drawing on Lakoff and Johnson's (1999) concept of "embodied cognition", we pick up memories, associations, and experiences, professional and personal, that emerge as an organic part of the process in our bodily improvisations. In this way, the metaphorical thinking that is grounded in bodily experience is given a practical expression in our practice. The moving body in improvisation takes on a key role in illuminating these layers, not only linguistically but physically and imaginatively. The improvisational practice includes an aesthetic positioning where the metaphor becomes that which carries thought and not just relates to feeling. This opens up a scientific scenography where ideas and concepts are embodied, not just to be felt but to be investigated. According to Haseman (2006), performative research holds *practice* as the principal research activity, and thereby we see the material outcomes of this practice as significant representations of research findings. Further, we see that performative research is an arena for conceptual thinking in which the concept and feelings are not separated from the bodily practice.

3.3 Improvisation and Risk-Taking

There is a long tradition of improvisation within performance traditions and drama pedagogy. Well-known practitioners within the drama and theatre field such as Viola Spolin (1973) and Keith Johnstone (2015) describe improvisation as giving an “offer” through physical movements, verbal utterances, or facial expressions and being attentive to co-players’ “offers” to create a fruitful interplay. In traditional theatre practice, improvisation is a common tool for exploring and deepening a performance, often as a path towards creating clearer and aesthetically pleasing forms: a script, a scene, a role (Frost & Yarrow, 2016). Within drama pedagogy, improvisation encompasses a collaborative practice to explore stories, themes, and questions; to interpret different situations, fictive or real; and to investigate how interactions between different persons can be understood. Improvisation in this context is a constant negotiation between structure and spontaneity, aiming for learning and meaning-making (Taylor & Warner, 2006). Sawyer (2011) claims that “balancing structure and improvisation is the essence of the art of teaching” (p. 2). Teachers who are skilful improvisers make use of their intuition and performative ability, handling the tension between structure and freedom. Seeing improvisation as an asset in teaching emphasizes that the classroom practice is collectively created by teachers and students (Sawyer, 2011).

In his elaboration of transformative communication in Education, Biesta (2004) claims that there is always a gap in communication between teacher and student. Traditional Education strives to narrow or close this gap to achieve a transmission of information. However, the meaning of information is not something students passively receive but something they actively interpret through dynamic participation. It is in this gap, where interaction and dialogue are made possible, that learning takes place; therefore, a pedagogy of uncertainties and risk-taking should be encouraged (Biesta, 2004). We see our study as a performance practice that assents to this gap, which requires improvisation, and that a PL rather asks questions than gives answers, which is a risk that can cause confusion in an educational setting. As Frost & Yarrow point out: “aesthetics has always been risky, and the improvisatory is the place to get close to it” (Frost & Yarrow, 2016, p. 242). Further, improvising means daring to intervene in norms, behaviour and actions, and in academia, it also means daring to question paradigms, systems and structures (Frost & Yarrow, 2016).

4 The Process of Creating Three Performance Lectures

When we began the process of creating the PLs, we agreed that the texts on which their content is based (thesis, book and articles) must be integrated with the performance elements, not presented separately. That is, the PL should not be a physical representation of a text but an enunciation of the text's interpretation. Importantly, the interpretation should be processed through drama pedagogical, artistic, and theoretical knowledge.

4.1 *Pedagogical and Artistic Patterns of Diversity*

The term pattern stands, in this study, for the emerging and moving shapes in our work that became clearer to us the longer we proceeded in the process. It also became clearer for each PL that it was important not only to use expressions, techniques, and materials we usually use, but to challenge ourselves and to explore new practices. By doing so, we experienced a new kind of diversity in our working process and in our performative expressions. We did not have a preplanned and structured way of working and experienced that the ideas for the performative elements typically emerged in the gaps (Biesta, 2004) between the knowledge expressed in the textual content, the metaphors and embodied improvisations. The concept of *oscillation* gradually became relevant, though it describes a pendulum movement that does not result in equilibrium.² Our collaborative improvisation stimulated and deepened both our subjective and collaborative reflexivity about the content and the performative elements of the lectures and contributed to the emerging patterns and a fabric of deepened reflexivity. Furthermore, our understanding of the ecotone metaphor illuminates how the interplay between pedagogy and art creates tensions that support diversity. That is, the ecotone metaphor functioned not just as an expression but as a form of knowledge production. The ecotone constituted the terrain that kept our awareness on the tensions and risk-taking aspects of the PL-making process, without choosing one perspective over another.

In line with Lakoff and Johnson (1999), new metaphors surfaced as working tools during our process. They functioned as cognitive structures that came alive in our embodied improvisations

² The term is typically used in Natural Science. Oscillatory reactions most often occur in open systems where substances or energy are constantly added (Nationalencyklopedin, u.å.)

and through which we perceived and understood what is important in our process. Instead of a script, we used the metaphors to organize our thinking, feeling, perception, and action. The working metaphors used in our improvisations (“yellow containers”, “the gardener” and “tug of war”) questioned the taken-for-granted and became a moving pattern leading to choreographic suggestions. In the working process, some patterns became unstable, creating new openings for artistic diversity where some of the metaphors remained, and some were set aside. The metaphorical thinking and embodiment functioned as an invitation to movement rather than an instruction or a script, and improvisation affirmed this through its unpredictability, thereby reversing the traditional hierarchy between theory and practice.

A metaphor that became central for us early in the process originates from pupils’ utterances in Einarsson’s doctoral project. When pupils were interviewed about how they thought and felt about the drama lessons, they described a feeling in the body and mind that was a combination of expectation, joy and nervousness. They used the Swedish word *pirr*, to feel *pirr*, for which the closest English translation would be “tingle”, to feel “tingly”. Besides a positive expectation, *pirr* also connotes nervousness and restlessness related to the unknown. During our explorative processes, we recognized *tingle* in ourselves and found it to be an important dimension. The metaphor later evolved, and we combined “tingle” with “compass”, which adds a dimension of direction and relates to our responses to different intuitive and spontaneous expressions.

There are parallels between the “tingle-compass” and Fels’ description of “tug on the sleeve,” but the differences lay in the choice of words, where the “tingle-compass” could rather be described as a flux than a stop. Also, Fels’ use of “tug on the sleeve” underlines the importance of verbal reflection, while the “tingle-compass” does not always translate into words. With Ricoeur’s thinking (1977), the “tingle-compass” is a bridge between two words with different semantic origins, where “tingle” describes elusive sensations and compass has a concrete and practical meaning. Related to Lakoff & Johnson’s theory (1980), the “tingle-compass” illuminates that metaphors in our work are not only linguistic, but also bodily, spatial, and performative, something we express and interact with each other in a physical space, here and now. We see the “tingle-compass” as an organizing force in improvisation and interplay. In this sense, the metaphor works both as a tool for understanding and as a driving force for performative action.

Our use of the metaphor “tingle-compass” became a recurrent pattern, building on Ricoeur’s (1977) view of metaphors as sites of semantic tension, giving meaning through the interaction of words. The “tingle-compass” relates to intuition and sensations in the body and the mind; involves collaborative interplay; and connects to subjectivity, artistry and professional knowledge. Therefore, this metaphor became a guide to our artistic as well as our pedagogical considerations and choices. Particularly, our growing attentiveness to the “tingle-compass” signalled where to explore further and when it was time for a detour, and it simultaneously held the space of a future audience.

4.2 *Qualities in the Creation of Performance Lectures*

As the patterns in our oscillating work eventually grew clearer, the qualities of our working process became possible to formulate. We experienced that a metaphor is a terrain where body and reflexivity can meet (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999) and negotiate via improvisation. Further, the idea of the metaphor as an opening suggests that meaning is never fixed but arises in the field of tension between the literal and the transferred (Ricoeur, 1977). The tension between improvisation and structure becomes the place where the metaphor is realized but also destabilized (Sawyer, 2011). In addition, the metaphor puts the body at the centre of meaning-making, not as an illustrator but as an agent in the process of understanding. In addition, the corporeality of improvisation is not only expression but also critical testing and can be seen as an epistemology of the body (Loftus & Kinsella, 2021).

4.2.1 *Metaphor, Improvisation and Physical Material*

During the creation of the first PL, *The Ecotone*, Droppe and Offesson wrote logs after some of the working sessions, and it became clear that improvisation and the conceptual model Schooling-Ecotone-Art, with its intrinsic tensions, were interacting in the production of the material. In addition, the physical space where the work took place and the use of artefacts interacted with the improvisational embodiment and created fictional situations.

Droppe’s log, January 2022

The first image – the ropes as a delimiter and Offesson as an observer and me as an explorer. It becomes an explanatory aspect because Offesson observes. I try out different things and don’t

feel that I need to know what I'm doing, when I am doing it, nor explain, but what is verbalized comes out at the same time as I do. Or is it born from what I do in an interaction with verbal language? The ropes become important! They constitute the common ground for us; it is the ropes we play with, and we sense what they mean, but it becomes important in the doing and in the encounter with the observer. The ropes are very interesting to continue working with. They can become so many things. Interesting how the materials can change the meaning and feeling for me. I see the ropes in a different way in our exercise today than how I have seen them before. Since we made forms of Ecotones within Schooling, I look at the three areas [Schooling-Ecotone-Art] in a different way than before. Suddenly, they [Ecotones] become areas within Schooling. It wouldn't have happened from a verbal discussion. Or maybe it would have taken longer? The materials become co-creators. Ecotone is both a boundary and a territory.

In this entry, two levels of metaphors are at play: the concept Schooling-Ecotone-Art as the impetus for the exploration and the ropes that visualized that the ecotone can be movable and elusive: “the ropes can become so many things”. As the entry shows, the improvisation allowed for a “dance”, invited a critical investigation of the metaphor's boundaries, and shed light on the question of what happens on the edges – all of which opened up for diversity. New aspects of the metaphor were illuminated through physical objects, imaginative thinking, and its connection to improvisation and embodied cognition (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Offesson, as the observer and witness to Droppe's improvisation with the rope, supported the explorative process. The function of the witness can be seen from two perspectives: we were witnesses to each other in our collaborative work, and we were at the same time aware that the audience would be witnesses to our performance. This function sharpened our awareness of our intentions, which manifested in our reflections as well as in our bodies. This example displays the qualities of using artefacts in an explorative way and the importance of a witness during the creative process.

Offesson's log, January 2022

To explore through the chairs, through the idea of shapes, through a map with ropes. Be giving. Allow me as a subject, a bunch of straws through my membrane, through my identities, to breathe in and out of one another. Organically activate memories from pedagogical situations, my own practical theory, and the doing that has become my reason; my professional practice speaks to my exploration and my pedagogical side. What did we do today? A geographical map. Can Ecotones exist as small islands in Schooling? Can it go outside? Can Schooling consist of different Schoolings? How present is the diversity of different species? Is it like hawks flying above? Another layer, which does not share the physical world of Schoolings and Ecotones? Reality.

Offesson's log floats between the concrete bodily experience with the material, a poetic description of the inner processes, and reflective thoughts on the professional aspects of pedagogy. This describes a quality in our work where the pedagogical and artistic dimensions are present and constantly intertwined. The entry verbalizes in a poetic way the ongoing cognitive process

concerning the ecotone metaphor that was initiated by the improvisation with physical material, such as chairs and ropes (Image 1). It also describes the idea of a new metaphor, the geographical map, that enabled Offesson to describe the nature of the improvisational work. Both logs display that the improvisation generated a new and unexpected perspective of the Ecotone: that it was not just a separate area but a space that could move and be part of (be inside) the area of Schooling. This supports the idea that human thinking is metaphorically grounded in bodily experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

Image 1

The Ecotone



4.2.2 *Images, Movements, and Sounds*

As mentioned, the PL *The Method* was first presented at a research seminar at Malmö University. In the initial phase of creating this lecture, we asked ourselves how research could be embodied. In a later phase, we narrowed our investigation and focused on collaborative autoethnography related to corporality. In particular, we explored and challenged the tension between academic knowledge and embodiment, which risks reducing the body to a vessel for the mind and dismissing bodily experience (Loftus & Kinsella, 2022). Instead, we drew on the work of Lakoff and Johnson's (1999), who claim that "reason is embodied": we conceptualize abstract concepts based on inferences from sensorimotor (body-based) processes (p. 77). Further, abstract thought is dependent on metaphors, which are derived from bodily experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999); therefore, metaphors were equally important as explorative tools in our process.

In *The Method*, we took inspiration from two academic articles, but we focused on exploring the methodology itself and how it could be presented in a PL. Together, we wrote each word of our

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initial research question (“how”, “can”, “research”, “be”, “communicated”, “through”, “embodied”, “processes” and the word “question mark”) on separate sheets of paper. By taking turns, each word was given 5–10 minutes for interpretation, where two of the researchers interpreted it through an embodied response while the third wrote their thoughts in a mind map. The mind map for “how” included, among other words, two questions: “how do we make the impossible possible?” and “how do we escape rationality?” The mind map for “embodied” comprised several descriptions: “the body as being gathered”, “natural”, “moral”, “limited”, “free”, “captured”, “in stillness” and “in tension”. Attentive to the “tingle-compass” metaphor, we placed the mind maps in a large circle on the floor, and Droppe and Offesson performed an embodied response by playfully and literally placing themselves on the floor, mimicking the needles in a compass (Image 2). In our following reflection, we found that the mind maps evocatively brought to life the idea that we were moving bodies navigating inside an academic map and that our bodies as well as the map were constantly transforming. The mind maps on the floor, Droppe and Offesson’s bodily response, and Einarsson as a witness created impressions and gave us a cognitive, emotional, and corporal experience of the research question. They also created new questions, for example, “what is allowed to be called research?”

Image 2

The Method, The Compass



During a collaborative session, we individually created an abstract image with crayons to express how collaborative ethnography could be understood through images. In addition, Einarsson and Droppe each created a movement combined with a sound to represent how collaborative autoethnography could be interpreted through the body. The movements and sounds were

impossible to describe in words, underscoring the challenge of this investigation. However, Droppe labelled her expression (body and sound) “bouncing,” and Einarsson labelled her expression “entanglement” (Image 3), and in our individual reflections of the movements, we noted,

The impulse for the movement came from the imagination of me bouncing between large yellow containers that were floating around in space. In all the containers were knowledge, feelings, experiences, thoughts that the three of us carry. All of them contain exciting material, and one has to choose which containers to open. There are opportunities and perhaps risks of being led astray in all of them. The movement came from the feeling of balancing on the edge of one container and being about to jump to another. (Droppe)

As I tried to feel collaborative autoethnography in my body, I experienced how my arms and legs started to wrap and wind themselves around each other in snake-like movements. It was difficult to sort out how and why the movements started and how they could be resolved in a meaningful way. I almost lost my balance. (Einarsson)

The images and bodily expression can be described as a quality of complex experiential gestalts (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), as they emerged from our growing experiences and understanding of the complex interaction between the diversity of expressions when creating a PL. In our process, collaborative autoethnography became metaphorically represented in an expression that was also described with a label, thereby imposing the label on the concept of collaborative autoethnography. The two expressions “bouncing” and “entanglement” were incorporated in the end of the PL and were preceded by a question: “What have we actually learned about collaborative ethnography through this work?” Whereafter, we tore apart the abstract images and handed them out to the audience as an interactive element and an invitation to dialogue.

Image 3

The Method, Bouncing and Entanglement



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Thus, of the three PLs, *The Method* was the only physically interactive lecture in relation to the audience. Although the abstract images drawn during the working process were intended for individual reflection and collaborative analysis, they also became interactive elements in the PL. We received several comments on these images in the reflections emailed to us afterwards by some of the audience members: “What do the drawings mean and why did different people get different sized pieces of paper? Thinking about the artist as God...” (Person A).

This email reflection demonstrates that the response from the audience, as witnesses, can illuminate aspects that we as performers did unconsciously and were unaware of: we simply tore off and handed the audience different-sized pieces of paper, but the physical interaction between performers, audience, and physical material – through the giving and receiving of a piece of paper – stimulated a philosophical question related to the power of the artist. Another audience response concerns the dialogical potential in art and aesthetic expressions:

Is a performance lecture dialogic, and if so, why? Do we who work in art, culture and aesthetics have a notion that our expressions are dialogic in nature? If you get something in your “hand” – be it the spoken word, movement, sound or paper – is there a dialogue going on? Does the dialogue stop, or is it even a dialogue if the material stays with the recipient? (Person B)

In this reflection, the questions point to perceptions and possible preconceptions about art and inquire whether we see dialogue as intrinsic in a PL, unlike other teaching. An underlying question is whether PLs are *more* communicative than traditional lectures.

In *The Method*, our starting point was different from the other two since we investigated a methodological concept, rather than the content of a specific text. The reflections we received from the audience raised the question of the relation between content and format, which can be related to the question of intention:

I mostly remember what you did, not what you said. If I have to think about the temporary, live moment, in the moment. Possibly the word entanglement. The visual is alive. Also thinking about what the autoethnographic does/is/becomes in this? (Person C)

What happens to the material when you go from one medium to another, when you trans-mediate from speech (planning) to bodily expressions and movements. What is lost? What can you say with your body but not with words? (Person D)

Many possibilities for interpretation, for example, the two different interpretation regimes: art (ambiguity) and science (unambiguity/clarity), and the possibility of opening a third space when these are brought together/confronted; the balance with how strong a framing (interpretation

frames) of performance is necessary/desirable. And then I wonder what role “auto” plays and means, how personal one can/may be? (Person A)

The audience reflections point to the essential issue of the tension between the content and the performative elements. As Biesta (2017) points out, there is a risk of an “expressivist” justification of art in Education, where the opportunity to express oneself, to let one’s own voice be heard, becomes the main purpose. Instead, Biesta argues that the purpose of art in Education is to create opportunities for participants (performers and audience) as subjects to come into dialogue with the world. Accordingly, the interactive element in *The Method* was an important quality because it physically created an opportunity for the performers and the audience to come into dialogue and to interrogate how methodology can be discussed and understood.

As we performed *The Method* in an academic seminar attended by several of our colleagues, we felt nervous and vulnerable, which we acknowledged after the performance. The feelings of vulnerability somewhat surprised us, but they highlighted the aspect of risk-taking involved in integrating the artistic body and the academic body and pointed to the tensions in the gap between pedagogy and art. This aspect was addressed in one email response:

Towards the end of your performance, you asked a question, like, Can you really make a performance out of a scientific work? When you had asked that question, you looked a little startled, and then you started making various repetitive sounds and jerky movements. I perceived it as a refreshing self-criticism – it was as if you wanted to say, We don’t really know what we are doing [...]. I experienced it as if you were asking a difficult question and handing it over to us. It was neat and inspiring. I think many of us are nervous when we are going to present at a research seminar [...], it is common for us not to really know exactly what we have done and why we have done it [...]. It is MUCH less embarrassing to bare our throats the way you did – to show that this is an exploratory process without a clear goal or method – than to pretend to be a perfect academic who has always followed a perfect plan. (Person D)

The email reflection focuses not on the content but on the meta question of what research encompasses and what the role of the researcher is in a way that also expresses feelings, for example, when Person D comments that “many of us are nervous [...]”. Thus, asking essential questions in an embodied performance creates qualities of connection and dialogue supporting Biesta’s (2017) argument that art should enable us to connect to the world and thereby to each other.

4.2.3 *A Fabric as a Central Performative Element*

As previously mentioned, our third PL, *The Oasis*, was not initiated by ourselves but was an assignment from the Swedish Council of Culture Schools (*Kulturskolerådet*). We were tasked with creating a PL based on a book titled *The Oasis of Possibilities* (Röshammar & Sandh, 2023), which provides a historical overview of the development of culture schools in Sweden, discussing the impact of political decisions on these schools and featuring interviews with teachers, leaders in the organisation, and cultural figures.

To structure our collaborative autoethnographic work, we were each assigned to read certain parts of the book and individually create and bring a two-minute-long performance to our first working session. Einarsson created a scene based on memories from her childhood guitar lessons in a culture school. Offesson brought a dialogue he wrote based on memories of his cousin leaving the classroom to attend his culture school lessons. Droppe brought a film showing the mesmerizing flight of starlings, which came to her mind when reading the book because it uses starlings as a metaphor. This autoethnographic material not only became stepping stones for collaborative improvisation and reflexivity but was also developed and incorporated into the performance.

In the following associative process of thinking of the culture school as an oasis, the idea came up to use a large circular fabric in bright colours, a pedagogical material often used in preschool. The fabric served as a metaphor for the oasis and became a central performative element in the lecture. In our processing of the book, another metaphor surfaced: the “tug of war”. The Swedish Council of Culture Schools has long been caught in a tug of war between various competing interests, ideals, modes of governance, and stakeholders – including the state with its educational policies, the local municipalities with their practical constraints, teachers with strong artistic identities, and the compulsory school system demanding utility and adaptability.

Once “tug of war” was established as an important metaphor, we started to improvise around how it could be embodied. Aware that conscious thought is “the tip of an enormous iceberg” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 13) and that improvising is always interconnected with our experiences and the unconscious material we carry (Frost & Yarrow, 2016), we chose to use the fabric rather than using a rope, as one might expect in a traditional tug of war. We found that the fabric allowed for different interpretations that stimulated our improvisations around the “tug of war” metaphor. Through this embodied metaphorical inquiry, we started to improvise how we could embody the

metaphor by individually holding on to a side of the fabric. As we were three people, our bodies invited different kinds of movements and relational dynamics than a strict binary opposition; moreover, due to the pliability and softness of the fabric, our bodies responded differently to the fabric than they would to a rope. The improvisation became a dynamic arena for the metaphor to be questioned and contemplated, functioning not as an illustration but as a generative mode of inquiry. Through engaging physically, feeling tension, testing direction, and embodying roles, we produced new readings of the metaphor in relation to the content in the book. In one sequence, one body stated “I am the state” while pulling the fabric upwards, creating not just spatial but symbolic and hierarchical dynamics. The other bodies pulling back resisted not just physically but ideologically. Were they the local teachers, the children attending a culture school, or representatives of a different educational tradition? The bodies shifted between power positions embodied as professional roles, ideals, modes of governance, and sites of power. Their speech shifted in tone or intensity, accompanied by different postures.

Image 4

The Oasis, The Tug-of-War



This PL differed from the other two in that it was an official assignment to interpret a text we did not choose, and it was going to be performed for a large audience in a context unfamiliar to us. This created tensions in relation to our aim to be open to improvisation even during performances. Therefore, we discussed our responsibility to meet the council’s expectations for the PL and at the same time to embrace ambivalence and accept the energies of the as-yet-unknown, thereby perhaps discovering possibilities for doing things differently (Frost & Yarrow, 2016). Further, this PL contained more verbal dialogue than the other two PLs, necessary for the audience to understand the content, which added new challenges for us.

Nevertheless, as our PLs are primarily anchored in our bodies and in our interplay, not in a ready-made script, we decided to “allow” risk-taking improvisation even during the performance. Therefore, we decided not to predetermine the order of our opening lines. We also decided that we could change our lines as long as we maintained their meaning. Having done so, we experienced, on both occasions the PL was performed, that our attentiveness and listening to each other were heightened, which we consider an important quality. In a pedagogical as well as an artistic context, when the teacher is prepared to let go of control and allow an unexpected response and questioning from participants, this risk-taking quality supports knowledge production. In line with Lakoff and Johnson (1999), our conceptual systems and bodily experiences supported subjectivity, not as a fixed self but as dynamic and self-developed through shared embodiment. In our improvisatory work in *The Oasis*, our bodily intentions, risk-taking, and feelings of vulnerability were different. The “tingle-compass” was individually present, but through interplay and improvisation, it generated insights that could not have been predicted or predetermined, but a quality that was nevertheless interconnected.

5 Discussion

In this arts-based research study, we aimed to challenge the epistemological colonization (Carlgren, 2015) and reductionist approach in higher Education (Wickström, 2015). To accomplish this goal, we used the conceptual model Schooling-Ecotone-Art, which describes the tensions in educational culture, as a starting point. We also drew on Biesta’s (2004) work, acknowledging “the gap” between teachers, learners, artists, audience, and researchers not as something to narrow or bridge but as a space for communication – recognizing that meaning-making exists in and through communication. This includes embodied communication as well as verbal (Loftus & Kinsella, 2021).

The evaluation criteria for arts-based research cannot be judged by orthodox models but must be based on the specifics within the particular genre (Leavy, 2020), and this study has challenged our habitual ways of processing and presenting content. It has broadened our understanding of arts-based research and the outcomes of disrupting traditional research paradigms (Leavy, 2020), including how to write an article. The traditional form for an academic article involves yielding a result, which to some extent opposes the openness of the creative process of creating PLs.

However, as our work is anchored within arts-based research, this article itself can also be understood as performative and, therefore, part of an ongoing dialogue.

As drama teachers in higher Education, we sometimes encounter confusion, uncertainty, and resistance among students when we use performative genres such as storytelling, embodied improvisation, or creative writing in teaching. The tensions between the academic culture and improvisational and embodied learning are a recurring challenge due to high expectations of structure and predictability (Sawyer, 2011). Moreover, discursive pressure, evaluation criteria, and the lack of practical conditions in time and space risk limiting teachers' practice (Biesta, 2017). On the other hand, romanticising the body-language dynamic as something always productive risks neglecting the gaps and misunderstandings that are always there. In this study, Lakoff and Johnson's (1980, 1999) conceptual metaphor theory has deepened our theoretical and practical knowledge of how cognition, language, embodiment and improvisation can be integrated, which is a relevant yet underdeveloped area in teacher Education that requires further investigation.

Although the textual material and practical experience of creating the PLs uncovered several qualities and tensions that could foster diversity and learning, the audience reflections we received revealed important aspects we ourselves were unaware of. Such an outcome displays the complexities and potentials of the gaps in communication between performer and audience and between teacher and learner (Biesta, 2004). The audience reflections raised questions about research and the researcher role as well as about art in academia, which we believe has bearing on the educational context. Practicing art in Education puts the practitioner at risk, and although risk is often avoided in educational settings, we agree with Sawyer (2011) that it creates new and important possibilities.

6 Conclusion

The process of creating three PLs unfolded pedagogical and artistic patterns that were not clear to us before this study. Through the oscillation between textual content, embodiment, metaphorical thinking, improvisation and analysis, we developed our understanding of the diversity we as teachers, artists and researchers have access to. The metaphorical concept "tangle-compass" started out as a diffuse pattern, and as it was formulated, it developed into a quality we could use to bridge

pedagogical and artistic elements. Namely, it guided our choices of when to develop, question, deepen, change direction, or move on. It also gave us a shared way of communicating about the entangled and elusive elements present in the creative process of creating a PL. The “tingle-compass” enabled us to see fiction as a source of knowledge that involves imagination, role-taking, the use of physical material, dialogue, and the use of time and space. Consequently, the “tingle-compass” became a co-producer of knowledge that allows for a scientific scenography where ideas and concepts are embodied. The metaphors in our work placed the body at the centre as an agent in the process of cognition and knowing (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980); accordingly, improvisation becomes not only an expression and interplay but also a critical inquiry and, therefore, can be seen as an epistemology of the body.

Importantly, the hybridity of the PL form stimulates the audience’s imagination and curiosity, encouraging them to formulate different interpretations and questions about the content. We have found that our encounters with different audiences and the responses we received bridged and strengthened our pedagogical, artistic, and academic roles and their integration. We see the oscillation and negotiation between perspectives and roles as becoming qualities that maintain complexity in creative work as well as in teaching and learning. In addition, we see the PL as a relevant form of communicating research in both educational and public settings. This study contributes to the body of knowledge on performative research by exploring the possibilities it creates for diversity in higher Education by using metaphorical concepts, improvisation, and embodiment. We strive to further investigate how these qualities contribute to diversity in educational contexts.

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