Abstract

All man share a sensory experience when intra-actin with the world. My hypothesis is that persons with and without special needs can benefit of a performative approach to visual arts. With this text I am exploring and reflecting on a performative approach to visual arts and children with special needs. I deem performance art as a valuable path leading to other forms of teaching and learning from which children, and especially children with special needs, can benefit. In my role as artist-teacher and researcher in the field of visual arts, I take into account malleable material (like wool for example) as having the ability to create a rich context for discovering, exploring and learning. Inspired by the theoretical philosophy of new materialism, especially the work of Karen Barad (2007), I use her concepts of intra-action and agency. From that perspective I examine how performance art, using children's senses, space, material and relational aesthetic, can offer a rich context for children with special needs to evolve in school and kindergarten. The overall question guiding me through this work is: How can children with special needs meet, be involved, express themselves and/or interact during a performative act? The venue of the conference ‘Aesthetics and Children with Special Needs – an Interdisciplinary Approach’ in Oslo in 2015 was a fruitful moment to develop further my artistic and theoretical research on performance art as a way to meet children with special needs in other ways. I had the performance “REbelreBEL” with two teachers, during the opening of the conference. We used sounds and clay with textiles, aiming to create an encounter with children with special needs through auditory, tactile and visual elements. In my work, I do not necessarily focus on a child's weakness or medical diagnosis, but look rather at the actual encounter a child with special needs might have with an aesthetic experience.

Key words: inclusion, Visual arts, performance, aesthetic approach, special needs
Introduction

Acknowledging the diversity of people, especially among children and youth, as well as the diversity of visual arts and its place and role in schools is the starting point of this paper. The idea of diversity lies not only on dissimilarity that separates entities. Diversity is also about nuances that enrich our understanding and knowledge production, in this case in artistic and educational settings.

In this paper, I address visual arts and art(istic) education in a Norwegian context. My empirical material comes from two Norwegian universities where I conducted several performative approaches to the subject of visual arts in teacher education with three groups of students.

This text starts by introducing my ongoing work as an artist, researcher and teacher.

The second part of the text discusses the notion of diversity by using the theory of Howard Gardner (1993) about multiple intelligence. Then I address the role of the body in aesthetic learning processes, and the role of materiality of materials.

In the third part of the text, I suggest that performative approaches to the subject of visual arts may broaden and enrich our vision about not only what to teach but also how to teach arts. This third part looks like a visual essay. It contains many pictures preceded by a short introduction to three different contexts in which we used a performative approach to visual arts in teacher training. These contexts carry several feedbacks written by students that participated in those performative events.

Toward the end, I have a short analytical reading of these three contexts.

This chapter contributes to improve awareness and give a broader insight into how performative approaches can help to include children with special needs, children with different mother tongues, and how we can consolidate a group of adult students coming from different countries.

My ongoing work as artist, researcher and teacher

Art is my passion, my creative practice and my work in different artistic and educational settings. I evolve between moments of creation, moments during which my ideas are tested, realised and then sensorily tasted. Simultaneously, I evolve between moments of reflections, contradictions and transformations. Those are transformations in my art making, teaching in art subject, and arts-based research. Art is what I do in different settings, spaces with different people, and it results in different forms of outcomes. My methodological approach is a/r/tography, which is an arts-based research that includes living inquiry through art and text in educational research (Springgay et al. 2005). This
means that I entangle my diverse identity of artist, researcher and teacher in scholarly enquiry in my practices. My three practices encompass different type of materials, such as the acts of making physical items and the use of spoken or written words. This varied material has aesthetical, pedagogical and reflexive value in the enquiring of my work within different practices.

I use a material-discursive (Barad, 2007) approach in what I do as an artist, researcher and teacher. Barad (2007) emphasises the entangled inseparability of discourse and materiality as following:

“The relationship between the material and the discursive is one of mutual entailment. Neither is articulated/articulable in the absence of the other; matter and meaning are mutually articulated. Neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically or epistemologically prior. Neither can be explained in terms of the other. Neither has privileged status in determining the other”. (Barad, 2007, p. 152)

The entanglement between my physical materials (paper, charcoal, wool, and such) and the materiality of my reflections (throughs, words and concepts) is intimately related. This means that my practices are constituted by both matter and meanings. My empirical material (including bodies, space, time and objects) is not separated from my practice as researcher. The material-discursive on my materials and my thoughts have effect on my work (that include my three practices). For Barad, materiality is not a separate and static unit, materiality is rather dynamically components produced in situ; it is “not a thing but a doing” (Barad, 2007, p. 151).

I do not always try to understand only cognitively what I/we do, I also try to be in the moment of experiencing and creating acts I enact with other people. The participants to my practices are sometimes university students, the public in art exhibitions, or teachers and scholars in conferences.

It is the intensity of co-making during a shared moment of aesthetic experience that I seek to enact with other participants. The intensity of an event is what Deleuze and Guattari (1980) explain as a state of “becoming” or “affect”. The intensity of an experience changes us as it brings us elsewhere. This elsewhere can enclose new insight and understanding of a material or a technique. Besides that, it also brings deeper or a different understanding of ourselves. The intensity of co-making during a shared moment of aesthetic experience brings people and materials together. It is through our sensory and cognitive approaches that we materialize physical things and reflections.

I use the world co-making instead of collaborating. This is because to collaborate do not necessarily include the idea of doing physically something together. It is in the co-making that we become acquainted with others differently, when
handling with the materials and each other's gestures and movements. A person discover herself continuously in relationship with others.

Achieving a common experience is not synonymous with experiencing the same. This is common for both a learning context and an artistic experience. Students or a public sharing the same experience do not necessarily go through the same transition. The threshold, as “The magnitude or intensity that must be exceeded for a certain reaction, phenomenon, result, or condition to occur or be manifested”1, during an aesthetic learning process can give different ways of experiencing a shared experience. We are affected differently and we are transformed differently because we are dissimilar people. For Massumi,

“When you affect something, you are opening yourself up to being affected in turn, and in a slightly different way than you might have been the moment before. You have made a transition, however slight. You have stepped over a threshold. Affect is this passing of a threshold, seen from the point of view of the change in capacity”. (Massumi, 2015, p. 110-111)

In this respect, a diversified approach to arts teaching and arts dissemination enlarge the interface between humans, materials, space and our immaterial surroundings (as time or duration, sensing and thinking). A performative approach (I shall come back to performativity in the third section) allows a diversified approach to art education, which in return gives people different ways to be included and affected in an artistic or creative experience. Affects "are basically ways of connecting, to others and other situations, of affecting and being affected" (Massumi, 2015, p.110).Affection, in Massumi’s terms, differs from the common understanding of affect as having an affection (sentimentality) for something. Affect here is rather something that does something to us, which transforms us. As mentioned above, an intensity that brings people elsewhere in different ways.

When I use a performative approach to the subject of visual arts in teacher training, I do not seek to control a process. I seek to make more visible the agency of the interaction between individuals, the material and the space we occupy. I will show concrete examples of this from my teaching practice in the third part of this text. I shall first introduce the theory of multiple intelligence, and address the role of the body and materiality in aesthetics learning processes.

Inclusion of diversity

Diversity can destabilise normality if normality follows a logic that separates and mutually exclude different ways of thinking and learning. If we have a dichotomy between mind and body, then we risk diminishing learning and

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1 Source of that definition: https://www.lexico.com/definition/threshold Retrieved on January 2021
teaching potentials inherent different individuals. Loris Malaguzzi and his work within Reggio Emilia educational philosophy (Vecchi and Giudici, 2010) is for instance a great source of inspiration for those resisting this kind of dichotomy. In the world of contemporary art, performance art has transformed the traditional passive public into active participants contributing to the act of art making that gives great importance to actions, not only to visual aesthetical elements (Fischer-Lichte2008). In educational setting some Norwegian pedagogues (Sandvik 2013, Ulla 2015, Larsen 2015, Andersen 2015, Otterstad 2018, and Jamouchi 2020)value a different approach to teacher training that resist the dichotomy between thinking and doing, or in other words between practice and theory. This approach is inspired by a material-discursive ontology as we see in post human approach, as for instance among theories of new materialism with Barad (2007).This means that material and reflection are mutually constituting as they are inseparable.

Malaguzzi (1920-1994) deplored that we teach children to separate their body from their head. In new materialism, one perceives that the dominant Euro-Western tradition neglects or diminishes matter into a passive substance intrinsically devoid of meaning(Gamble, Hanan & Nail 2019). Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008) claims that the transformative power of performance lies on different parts of the work. The present, live moment transforming the spectator into an actor is one of them. In doing so the public do not only contemplate an art object, but the public contribute to the artistic action by participating actively at its creation. In this respect, objects, actions and reflections are entangled and become the piece of art itself.

In my view, we can encourage a more inclusive teaching practice when we acknowledge and value the vitality of an encounter between materials and different people. However, that approach can disturb conventional teaching practices that promote a single learning outcome as the adequate response to standardised and predetermined results.

The notion of normality is of course a challenging term. It is culturally determinate, it is constantly in motion as it changes during history, and it may mean different things in different fields of study. However, even if normality is an ideal, normality can be understood as to be what the majority consider as normal to do or think when we talk about knowledge or knowledge production. Hence, divergence from a set of norms (in education, art or science) can be what we consider and place outside ‘normality’.

The term of inclusion is interesting to discuss in relation to normality and diversity. If there is normality, which need to be included by what is different from it. Then this means that we want and seek to be alike. Alike the majority considered as being the representation of normality. This is a crucial and interesting moment in educational settings, especially if we consider teaching
and learning practices. What are the children's potentials, and are those potentials taken in account when we assess students? What place has the body and the materiality of the different elements we use in schools for learning purposes? Those are the questions I address in this section.

Multiple intelligences

If we follow the theory of Howard Gardner (1993), an American developmental psychologist and professor of cognition in education, it seems that different other forms of intelligences go unnoticed in traditional standard intelligence theory. Gardner questions the idea of intelligence and advocates for a more holistic and diverse understanding of what learning means. He proposes eight forms of intelligence and underlines that they rarely operate independently. The two first are classical ways to understand intelligence in educational settings; the next three are close to artistic thinking; and the two last ones are closely connected to individual's personality. Those multiples intelligences are linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, special, body-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. This theory is an account of diversity and includes persons with diverse forms of thinking, understanding and learning. We all have different kind of capacities and abilities.

The idea of multiple intelligences (MI) is essential to recognise people as whole humans. It is simple to apply to different teaching situations, to different tasks and with different people. “The more complex, rich in content and fragmentary our society and culture is, the more important it is to find the basic platforms that can function as mediating and open” (Juell and Norskog, 2001, p. 35). Juell and Norskog recognise that the idea of multiple intelligences demands a fundamental change in how school is structured. School should not only focus on linguistic and logical-mathematical abilities, but also on the diverse skills that students have. Juell and Norskog deplore that economical context dictate how we teach, as schools tend to eliminate arts classes when they need to spare money (Juell and Norskog, 2001, p. 42).

One of the intelligences proposed by Gardner as mentioned above is body-kinesthetic. A type of intelligence that is often essential and close to artistic thinking and making.

Body-kinesthetic intelligence is characterised by the use of body and movements to understand, learn, or memorise. Students with bodily-kinesthetic intelligence will touch and manipulate materials and objects when learning about them. However, multiple intelligence is not only about learning, it is also about exploring a material, a topic or a technique. This is something we do by using our tactile senses, being directly in contact with the material.
Manual crafting with bare hands or any direct contact between the materials and the body is one way to acknowledge the body and embodied forms of relation to our environments, as well as embodied forms of learning. A direct bodily contact without interference of mechanical or technological mediatory elements is what we sometimes call low technology.

In principle, we mostly need little technical means. We use local resources, and use local and recyclable materials. As in the picture below, we see how students use their bare hands to separate natural wool fibers before going into the next phase of wool felting. In such working process, as manual wool felting, we can go by ourselves / alone through the entire working process: from raw material to the finished work. This means that one can rule over the processes of production as a whole. That gives us the opportunity to develop a complex and / or a creative approach to materials. Such working processes are different from fragmented industrial productions systems without an overview or understanding of the whole process and knowledge of materials used. This gives us the opportunity to influence the whole process and the opportunity to explore alone or with others. In this case, bodily learning processes and understanding of materials play a key role.

Students use their bare hands to separate natural wool fibers before going into the next phase of wool felting.

The body

Diverse aesthetic learning processes allow for a more holistic understanding and approach to visual arts. I do not devote more attention to only the mind or only the body. Cognition and bodily sensory learning processes are not mutually exclusive. Reggio Emilia pedagogy recognises that children have more than one type of langue. Children communicate via a long more complex and rich forms of expression. Loris Malaguzzi(1920-1994) initiated and developed what today is known as Reggio Emilia educational philosophy. One of his poems describes how society and school isolate the head from the body:
«The school and the culture
separate the head from the body.

They tell the child:
to think without hands
to do without head
to listen and not to speak»


Loris Malaguzzi has a non-dichotomist approach to children. This approach is children centred and give attention to children's inherent way of being. Malaguzzi's idea was that by working with a chosen topic over a long period of time, one can stimulate children’s sensory experiences and sensory awareness (Sørensen2011, p. 127, author's translation). Reggio Emilia educational philosophy is known for its extensive use of art and art pedagogues to introduce different topics to children. Visual arts allow to experience and understand an esthetical event sensory and cognitively.

I wrote elsewhere that:

“The meeting point between the art and the children is a source of learning and development in a specific way, namely connected to the child’s viewpoint rather than the teacher position. The aim of teaching arts should not be restricted to giving instructions and information about techniques and materials, but should be an opportunity to explore these things from a child's perspective and own interest” (Jamouchi 2018, p. 257-258).

The materiality of materials

One can see materials and objects as having a specific way to be used and handled. In school settings, we often think about objects and materials as pedagogical materials. But what else can objects and material afford? A piece of textile or yarn can invite us to do more than just sewing or knitting. Beside a pedagogical usefulness of objects and materials, we can see an aesthetical usefulness that the materiality of things affords. Hege Hansson (2016) challenges the idea of using materials only as pedagogical items. She argues that when we use objects and materials in a traditional, delimited, stereotype way, we also reduce the appealing complexity of the things we use. Hansson calls this
a “complex reduction of learning processes and the learning itself” (Hansson 2016, p. 54, author translation).

When we meet new materials in the subject of visual arts, we also meet new situations, challenges, moments of wonder, possibilities to explore differently and expand our understanding as the materials affect our previous knowledge and understanding. However, we can also expand our knowledge by understanding better, deeper, more intimately and gain more awareness about materials when we deepen our relationship to it. Access to a large quantity of different kind of materials is not the only criteria that contribute to expand our knowledge and understanding in the subject of visual arts.

Textile as an object of discovery through a performative approach gives to the participants the opportunity to participate actively in the co-making as we approach textiles both visually as well as bodily (Jamouchi 2018, p. 255). This approach to material values aesthetic and creative aspects that can occur between a child and the materiality of materials. This approach resists the idea of using items in a pedagogical way that promotes one specific predetermined outcome that is pre-established only by the teacher or the curriculum.

In the subject of visual arts, one can study and describe materials as amorphous or inert entities, as if materials are passive until we do something to them. However, we can also approach materials from a more dialogical perspective and be in interaction with them. Some materials are extremely malleable and offer unforeseen moments that can lead the students to creative de-(con)struction, shifting, and non-identical repetitions. In the next part, I will present how performative approaches to objects and materials bring a more dynamic encounter between persons and things/matter. This in return brings diversity and inclusion that a conventional teaching practice risks to lack.

Performative approaches to the subject of visual arts

This part of the text has many pictures that convey what words might fail to reveal. This visual material conveys three different contexts that show three different ways of working performatively with visual arts in teacher education. The first one is an installation and performance produced by five teacher students, the second one is a performative drawing session undertaken by 14 children, and the third one is a wool felting session with 10 international teacher students. This order follows the chronological timing of those events that are respectively from 2015, 2017 and 2019.
I introduce each context with a short text narrating what we did in the campus and how I introduced those forms of expression to my students. Beside the visual materials that convey what we have done, I give the floor to my students who express how they experienced those performative events. Their feedbacks give us their impressions and this contributes to acknowledge their awareness and involvement during their study. Student's feedbacks bring a first-hand experience to the reader of this text. By doing so, I aim to provoke deeper reflections and discussions in order to celebrate diversity and inclusion in art making and art dissemination.

First context - Installation and performance

Five students explored diverse materials with children in an infant school. This is the result of a teaching session we had about and though installation and performance. I introduced performance art by showing videos of some of my previous artistic works and by inviting my students to explore the materiality of materials from their different visual, olfactive, hearing and tactile qualities. By doing so, we expand the traditional or routinely approach to objects and materials confined to sight and vision. In this case, we extend the perception of things to a richer and more nuanced sensory apparatus.

One of the works I showed them is the video from an installation combined with a performance we had at the art and design hall of Oslo. This installation was presented in 2015 at the opening of the international conference “Aesthetics and children with special needs – an Interdisciplinary Approach”. I used textile, thread, and clay to create, transform and delimit space. I used movements, speed, repetitions, and displacements to create dynamics. This was to show the inherent qualities of the materials through the performance while I manipulated white textiles, red thread, as I transformed the space of the exhibition room.
In addition to the video from the installation and performance, I presented one of my articles about creating a rich context for children (Jamouchi 2018, p. 259). Installation and performance art, also in a pedagogical context, offers different modes of interaction and a rich experience with materials, space and body movement and involvement. By a rich context, I mean giving participants diverse possibilities for exploring, experiencing and discovering.

A rich experience with different evolving soft elements (textile and yarn) makes it possible to immerse oneself according to what interests, what position and possibilities a child has. That involves all our senses, our body, as well as our diverse physical and mental aptitudes. Immersion in a rich context with textiles offers, for instance, the following possibilities:

Contrast: colours, textures, scales, surfaces of different fabrics and yarns

Forms and patterns: open, closed, linear, plain, organic, geometric

Movements: large and open, rapid and short, movement of the material following the movement of the body

Similarity in the composition: movements following the rhythm of the music and/or other sounds, accurate repetition or minor variations in the movements

Open ended structure: non-linear or non-narrative structure

Sensory approaches: tactile, visual, auditory, olfactive, bodily, kinaesthetic

Participation: non-passive, immersion, making, agency

Interpretation: personal, collective, national or international heritage, cultural and other ancient or contemporary references
Space: use of a space as a shared laboratory during creative action and interaction (Jamouchi 2018, p. 260)

The pictures below show this group of five students exploring a similar approach to visual arts with materials such as leaves, gloves filled with water, chestnuts and large cardboard boxes. Their intentional use of body language, more than spoken language and an outdoor space in the school area was determinant in this performative event. The children were free to move around and play with their whole body and senses as the students invited them through gestures and actions.

After that event, I asked the students to write some reflections notes about this experience. I use those feedbacks in my artistic and arts-based research, but primarily in my practice as teacher. That contributes to give newer students a sense of what is possible to do with simple, everyday objects to create an inviting environment.
Group of five students exploring a performative approach to visual arts with materials such as leaves, gloves filled with water, chestnuts and large cardboard boxes.

I ask my students to write reflections notes to make “visible” their experiences differently and articulate with words what they had done physically. The reflection notes are often in relation to what we discuss in the classroom. The feedbacks show how the students invite young children through non-verbal communication, with body language, imitation, iterations and so on. We can also see how objects become attractive materials when they miss their original or intended function. It is the materiality of the objects that becomes attractive when looking at them and using them differently. In this case, it appears that all children, including those that usually remain silent in the group, get involved in exploring objects through the qualities of their materiality.
As mentioned above, I also use student's feedbacks in my teaching sessions with new students. Some of the words are highlighted with red colour because I give a particular attention to them when I present those feedbacks in the classroom. Here are some parts of the students' reflection notes:

During the event, we looked at the interaction between children and adults.

We looked at how the adult invited and inspired to what happened, for the child to be part of the activity. We also looked at how the adults responded to the children's initiative.

The students started their performance before the children came to that space.

We had agreed in advance that the on-going play should not be predetermined, but rather that the children's reactions and spontaneous play should not be controlled.

We focused on nonverbal communication in the interaction with the children, and the participants. Used therefore body language and inviting gestures in the game.

The children were quite reserved at the start, but eventually they started exploring our installation.

We also had the impression that performance art is suitable for children's dissemination method. The children responded and interacted with the adults.

The children were first awaiting and seemed to observe the situation.

We got the impression that the children thought the activity was rewarding. They seemed confident and when they felt ready, they actively participated in the activity that the adults were involved in and their own projects.

The cardboard boxes no longer only served as storage items, they also became shoes, houses, walls, etc. The same was true with both the chestnuts and the gloves. In addition to the physical qualities the objects had, they also had an important role as "bridges" between the children and the adults. The children did not need to relate directly to an unknown adult, but the objects invited to play.

The objects thus became a way into the interaction. One of the main goals of the study practice was that performance would allow the children to experience and explore a creative process that they themselves contribute to. We wanted the performance to be a dialogue between us adults and children. This means that we need to be very responsive, to catching up with the children's initiative, and responding to their progress.
This gave us new insight into less verbal ways to get in touch with the children.

Performance art also fits well as a form of expression in kindergarten. There is often a big focus on finished products in the kindergarten, which is often at the expense of “here and now” and the actual processes. The fact that the process itself is the art work, as it is in the performance, implies that it is the play with the materials and exploration of space that are in focus. This fits well with both the framework plan and the literature.

Second context -Performative drawing

I have conducted performative drawing as a part of my teacher practice and in my arts-based research. The empirical material I use here comes from the visual documentation in my archive and from two texts that published in international scientific journals (Jamouchi, 2019 and 2020). The material-discursive aspect is continuously present in the way I connect what I do as an artist-teacher and as a researcher. In the case of performative drawing, I explore works of to-dimensional form of expression by looking at the different possibilities afforded by materials, space and by engaging the whole body in such activity. Doing and reflecting goes hand in hand. The act of making drawings and thinking drawing are intimately entangled.

According to my students that work in kindergarten, drawing is one of the most usual activity in Norwegian kindergarten. However, it seems that drawing as a dynamic and creative process is something that has a great potential of improvement. The traditional use of drawing in the kindergarten involves children sitting alone on a chair, using crayon or a pencil, and drawing on an A4 sheet of paper placed on a table. Drawing serves as a kind of withdrawal, albeit creative one – form of engagement with other children or teacher.

The aim of my study on performative drawing is to see how musicality and performativity can emerge from a drawing session within the field of visual arts, rather than adding other school subjects as music and drama in an artificial or instrumental way to it. My hypothesis is that a performative approach to drawing - encompassing bodily engagement, co-making and nonverbal communication - creates a richer context for learning and development in the kindergarten and school. My goal is to contribute to a broaden understanding, and improve the practice, of drawing in educational settings. One of my strategy to achieve this goal is to undergo such performative drawing in the University campus with teacher training students. Then, after such a performative drawing session, I ask them to enter another reflection form on what we did by writing some notes just after our drawing session.
The pictures below show a couple of performative drawing sessions. What I seek to convey to students is the potential of re-thinking use of materials, space and the body in a two-dimensional form of expression.

Performative drawing in the campus, 2017

Performative drawing in the campus, 2017

The written feedbacks show that the students undergo a transformative approach to their understanding of the subject of visual arts and they see that drawing can be a social praxis where the teacher and children engage in mutual recognition, dialogue, and play. The feedback so often showed emotional charge beyond merely neutral analysis. Some students reported feeling that they were suddenly thrust outside of who they normally were, in terms of role, bodily motions and expressivity habitual in a classroom, constraints of style, and were acting now as artists. One of the students expressed it as following: “I just let the ideas flow. I tried to do exactly what I thought, without letting my critical sense get in the way. I tried to think in term of gesture instead of graphic expression”. Another feedback reveals how the materiality of the paper and the body merged: “We became a part of the paper”. The empirical materials collected
during performative drawing sessions are testimony of intense experiences in situ2.

Many of my students are inspired by performative drawing sessions we have in the campus and bring this to their workplace3. One of them brought further what we did and she adapted the performative drawing session for very young children: 14 children in age 3 – 5 years old.

A couple of weeks later, this student showed me pictures of her performative drawing with children at her work place in an infant school. I asked her if I could show them to others. She requested permission to disseminate the pictures and send me the e-mail below, together with her photographs.

Her e-mail contains words that tell how she experienced the performative approach to drawing and the pictures show what the children did during this drawing session.

Hi Samira,

I promised today to send you pictures from the performance I started in my kindergarten.

This is my group. They are 14 children from 3 to 5 years old. What's very difficult for me is to capture the attention of all of them in an activity. To reach them and engage them. It is not only the age difference that is difficult, but also that 8 of them have difficulty with the (Norwegian) language. Therefore, I thought that an arts and craft activity would be very good for this group.

As I thought, it turned out that this was a very interesting project. Before the activity started, everyone sat in a ring without socks. I took a charcoal and started making some lines. Then I got up and gave the charcoal to one of the older children who is very safe in the group, he came and continued to draw. Then I went around and gave everyone a charcoal each.

The kids were in flow all together. Occasionally, some of the kids needed to move a little bit. They took a small tour around in the classroom and they were allowed to decide for themselves. Then they came back and went on with the creative process.

There were so many things they could discover. First, the actual charcoal they draw with, they had not seen something like that before. Then they made some

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2 For more information on performance drawing see my article «Teaching training in art and craft: drawing as a performative act» In the Journal of the European Teacher Education Network, 2017, Vol. 12, 1-12.

3 This is mostly the case for part-time students that work in infant schools in addition to pursuing a university degree in the field of teacher education.
lines/shapes, then they could almost rub it, then the drawing had a new appearance after they wiped a little on its surface by hand, and then they realized that they could also draw on the wall. Soon they looked at their feet ... they also made some tracks. The hands were coloured too.

Nobody argued. No one spoke. Everyone just tried to find a place where they could explore the "magic" charcoal. The children who lack language skills could be creative in line with all the others, who usually take much more space/attention.

What they draw was also interesting. A girl drew her grandma who passed away (that was the big heart in the middle). A child who tends to be turbulent under the gatherings, drew slowly long straight parallel lines. The children drew close to each other, this was a joint drawing. Everyone was included and the language could not split them up during this nice moment.

Sincerely,

M.
Third context - A performative approach to wool felting

This part of the text comes from a research I have conducted earlier on the topic of affective togetherness in art education (Jamouchi 2020). The results of that research are published in a special issue of the journal “MATTER. Journal of new materialist research”. That special issue arises from the international conference “Affects as pedagogy: Relation between space, time and bodies” which took place in November 2019 in Fundatió Antoni Tàpies of Barcelona and was organized by the University of Barcelona. As the redactors De Riba-Mayoral and Revelles-Benavente state, affects as pedagogy refers to the labour of focusing on the becomings, relations and processes enabling practices that modify the register of the world. My contribution was about how to expand the traditional meaning of pedagogy, when connecting arts for rethinking teaching and learning paths. I outlined how the performative act of wool felting enables intra-actions of the body, space, times and materials and the feeling of togetherness. The
redactors of the journal described my article as following: the article provides new dimensions for the field of arts-based research as it underlines how arts, affects and pedagogical praxis can open spaces for reflection and actions.

Felt is the oldest form of fabric known to humankind. Felt is a non-woven fabric made primarily out of animal fibres. Wet felting is a technique turning animal hair, usually wool, into felt. The wool is washed, carded, and pulled to loosen the fibres, which are then arranged and overlaid. Water and soap are applied to open up the fibres. Then, by means of steps including manual compression, rubbing, squeezing, palming, and rolling, the loosened fibres are densely entangled and bound together into a coherent and stable flat form. Wet felting involves a great deal of physical manipulation and lends itself to group participation.

When I work with a performative wool felting with students, I start by demonstrating the different qualities of felting technique. Then, I let the students become acquainted with the material and the technique before working on large-scale, co-making project. The neology co-making suits good here. To collaborate do not necessarily include the idea of doing physically something together. As the students stand in their written feedbacks, it is in the co-making that we become acquainted with others differently, when handling with the materials and each other's gestures and movements.

The pictures below are from three different performative wool felting sessions in Norway. The feedbacks I refer to (after the pictures) are from one group of international students spending a study semester in Norway.

*Source: [http://www.torbandreiner.com/felt-history-general](http://www.torbandreiner.com/felt-history-general)*
Performative felting session, in the campus, 2018.

Performative felting session, in the campus, 2018.
Performative felting session, in the campus, 2019.

Teacher training students connect often what we do to their future profession as teacher. Even if the didactical aspect is clearly included in their feedback, their personal experiences of the event are substantial. The feedbacks are sometimes few words, sometimes shorter or longer sentences, and sometimes a longer text. The group of students I refer to here is an international group of students following an art subject course during their international exchange program in Norway in fall semester 2019. I asked them to answer the following questions: What is your experience of wool felting? What did you think, feel, or notice?

Denis5 wrote: “The material seems so fragile but during the working process I’ve experienced again how strong and flexible the wool can be. What I also appreciate is the ‘surprise effect’ during the felting process! You never know exactly what the outcome might look like! Because the felting process is quite long you somehow start building up a kind of ‘relationship’ (I don’t find another word for it) with your artwork – that makes you even more proud when you’ve finished your project”.

Here we see how her relationship to the materiality of wool and the felting process seem to have an autonomous course with its own agency. This is why the process and the final product can surprise us. The experience of affect is strong here: the student gets affected and actually opens herself for what the material can bring as non-expected moments. Further, Denis points out how time is a component that contributes to building a relationship with the material.

* All the names are fictional to anonymise the participants.
Veronique had a similar feedback about the autonomous course of the process: “I didn’t have to think too much about what I was doing, I just could use my hands and it developed kind of by itself”. Caroline concludes: “As a teacher I will keep in mind that for wool felting pupils do not need an introduction because they have to pay attention to how the wool behaves and it shapes”.

The felting process reveals agency when intra-acting with us. An introduction to wool felting is not enough to understand all the qualities and possibilities wool felting has. It is the process, through performing wool felting, that one gets a broader understanding of it. Exactly that kind of understanding of wool felting and all the moments emerging during the process are difficult to enact in a traditional approach based on a visual, formal aesthetic art didactic.

**Analytical reading of those three contexts**

This part of the text is a short analytical reading of the three contexts presented above: 1) installation and performance, 2) performative drawing, and 3) a performative approach to wool felting.

In the context of installation and performance, this study shows that the use of flexible and transformable materials offered for exploration might lead children, also children with special needs, into a participative and creative process. When we acknowledge the body as the primary site of perception (not only cognition and spoken language), we also open for less conventional teaching approach (children-centred learning instead of curricula-centred teaching). Participation and agency are valued, and children approach the materials out of their own conception and appraisal of their own abilities. The artist-teacher can in return comprehend other type of intelligences children have. The interaction with objects in an installation during a performance may challenge the traditional use of the body, the room, the space and position between teacher and the child, and the classic understanding of what intelligence might be. Thus, though installation and performance, we can offer children with special needs involvement, experience of creative agency and feeling of mastering a learning situation.

In the context of performative drawing, we see that children with different mother tongues and different attitudes, or different need for attention and care, manage to gather in a common activity. When children speak another language then the one spoken by the majority around them, performative drawing appears to be an activity that plays a strengthening role. Coming together in a sharing activity is something valuable and important in human life, also in a lifelong learning perspective. This enhance social inclusion, active citizenship and not least personal development. My students have frequently described drawing as an assignment to enable the teacher to concentrate on other tasks, as an attempt to lower the level of noise in the classroom, or just something
children do on their own. The traditional use of drawing in the kindergarten or school involves children sitting alone, using a crayon or a pencil, and drawing on an A4 sheet of paper placed on a table. Drawing serves as a kind of withdrawal, albeit creative one, from engagement with other children or the teacher. While there is nothing wrong with drawing as a solitary, creative act for children, performative drawing holds great possibilities for teachers to give children physical and mental proximity, to experience security and care, and to foster self-expression.

In the context of a performative approach to wool felting, students express a feeling of affective togetherness stimulated by the way they intra-act when engaging bodily with the material, the space and with each other, in an open-ended, creative way. Those students come from different countries and thus form a group of foreigners in a country that is not their homeland. It seems that this group of adult students become even more united as the material they use becomes simultaneously consolidated during the felting process. Working physically with a material that transform itself under the join gestures form each other’s movements and manipulation is almost like a metaphor of the metamorphosis that the group undergoes. The labour needed to transform loosen wool fibres is in this case a non-predetermined product outcome. It is a process that allow a sort of dialogue with the material, which in return affects the participants and give them a feeling of togetherness. This is an interesting way to re-discover a well-known material as wool is, and to re-discover oneself while co-making with others.

Concluding summary

The aim of his article is to share my ongoing work with people that are interested in the diversity of practices in arts-based research, art making and art teaching. In this study, I consider different ways of using a performative approach to visual arts. I believe that using materials and our senses differently can contribute to at list two things. Learn differently by acknowledging different forms of intelligence, and contribute to a more inclusive approach to people with diverse forms of abilities and interests.

I hope that those written words and visual materials give the reader some stimulating encounters with the children and teacher students mentioned here. By investigating three contexts, with their respective working processes and co-making practices, we see that performative approaches are platforms for experimental knowledge acquisition that hold potentials for further art based educational research as well as pedagogical possibilities.
Knowledge production is related to the materiality of the material and the event itself. It is not only the teacher that dictates what students are taught in the subject of visual arts. It is the performative event and the materiality of the materials that brings new forms of understanding by inviting the participants to sensory experiences and embodied knowledge in relation to what they do.

In light of this study, through visual arts in teacher education in Norway, it is clear that performative approaches allow a direct and rewarding dialogue with materials, with other participants and ourselves. This kind of performativity is non-representational, and involves the participants actively in a way that affect them and transform them there and then during the event. Which in return brings different forms of inclusion for both children and adults, especially in educational settings. The main point in this chapter is to increase how performative approaches to visual arts may function as an including learning process.

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