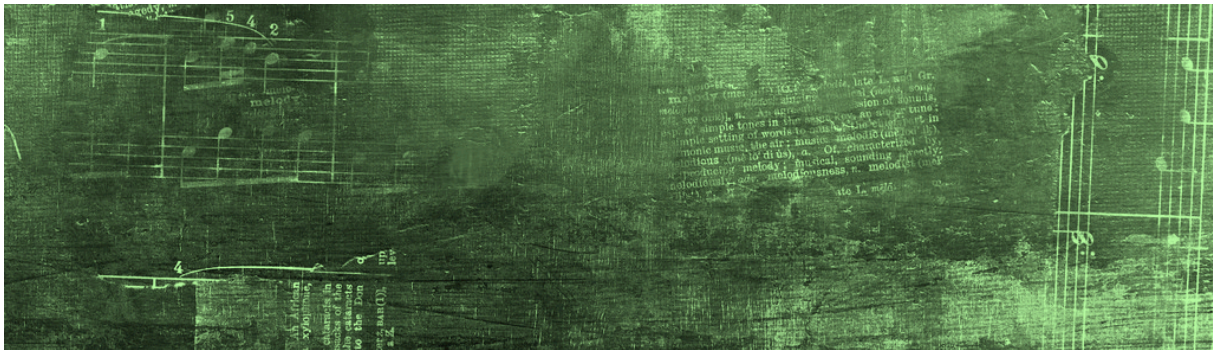


Arts-based research processes in ECEC: Examples from preparing and conducting a data collection

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PEER REVIEWED ARTICLE, VOL. 13(1), p. 1-15, PUBLISHED 31TH OF AUGUST 2016



Abstract: In this methodological article, different concepts and possibilities related to *how arts-based research processes can contribute in the early phases of ECEC research* will be presented and discussed. Despite a setback of art subjects in Norwegian ECEC and early childhood teacher's education, the field of arts still plays an important role, and is expected to be research-based. Thus, there should be a need for an aesthetical and arts-based dimension in researching ECEC, not only in the subject matter, but also in the method, context, outcome and dissemination. The article focuses on methodological issues in the question development/design phase and the data collection phase, exemplified by the author's own experiences in arts-based research processes. These processes include participation in dance and music performance as thinking or reflection tools in research, and an arts-based interview method. Some narrative writing processes will also be commented upon. Theoretically, the article primarily leans upon Barone and Eisner's arts-based research and Irwin and Springgay's a/r/tography.

Keywords: qualitative research methodology, arts-based research, early childhood education and care, music education

Introduction

The first time Niels (2.3 years) and I met, he was sitting at the table with the other kids. I placed myself at the other end of the table, where some girls clearly welcomed me to join their meal. Looking around, I made eye contact with most of the kids, but when looking in Niels' direction, he seemed annoyed and turned his head away from me, saying "Noooh," as if even a glance from me was invasive to him, and violating his private space. According to one of the other adults, this was the usual pattern for Niels, and during the next two weeks,

he maintained this kind of distance. Only once did he approach me. That was when I was playing the guitar, together with several kids sitting in front of me. Niels sat down too, though sort of behind me. Silently, he started turning one of the tuning pegs on my guitar, while the rest of us were playing and singing. He was clearly enjoying the change of sound that his actions made. Afterwards, he kept the same distance. I was never allowed to help him, and any attempt was loudly rejected. (...) (Elaborated log from fieldwork 2014)

The narrative above is from a fieldwork in a Norwegian day care institution, partly using arts-based research (ABR) methods. In early childhood education and care (ECEC) research, the term *arts-based* seems to be more often related to educational methods than research methodology.¹ Is this so because early childhood researchers are hardly working arts-based? I doubt such a claim. It could also be that they define the ways they use the arts in research by other concepts, or that they have a tendency not to verbally reveal the arts' place in their research, as I experienced in reinvestigating my own previous research (Vist, 2015). If this is the case, and the ABR methodologies can afford possibilities for knowledge that may otherwise be outside the range of sight, it might also be that the weaknesses and strengths in the arts-based processes are underexposed in the research dissemination, thereby also undermining the quality of the research. This article's aim is to put arts-based processes at the forefront, investigating *how arts-based research processes can contribute in the early phases of ECEC research*. The phases are often described as the question development- or design phase and the data collection phase, but working arts-based, the separation of the two may not always be as relevant.

Arts as knowledge

According to Cahnmann-Taylor (2008), there were few explicit references to the arts in research before the 1980s. The arts simply “had little to do with matters of knowledge” (Eisner, 2008a, p. 3). However, in philosophy and aesthetic theory, the arts and aesthetics have been seen in a different way, insofar as affording a certain type of knowledge about both oneself and the world (Aristoteles & Everson, 1988; Dewey, 1934/1980; Gadamer, 2004; Johnson, 2007; Reimer, 2005; Witkin, 1974). Moreover, in the Norwegian *Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens* (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006/2011), arts are related to knowledge: “Art, culture and creativity” (ibid, p. 23) is one of the “Learning Areas” (ibid, p. 21) and “shall help to ensure that children (...) experience that art, culture and aesthetics foster (...) understandings” (ibid, p. 24).

Despite the setback of the arts and aesthetic subjects in the Norwegian ECEC over the last few decades (Vist, 2014b; Østrem et al., 2009), this framework plan, as well as the curriculum and literature in our early childhood education, still claim the importance of aesthetic learning and knowledge formation. In one such textbook (Austring & Sørensen, 2006), aesthetic learning processes are seen as a way of learning through aesthetic mediation, formation and experiences. In this article too, aesthetic experiences, as well as the more narrow term art experiences,² are defined as evocative, embodied and emotionally strong impressions and expressions, affording possibilities to think of, reflect upon and communicate about oneself and the world.

It is my contention that if we agree on the need for aesthetic learning in children's care and education, there should also be a need for the arts and aesthetic dimensions in researching ECEC, not

¹ A search (August 2014) in [Academic Search Premier](#), *Eric* and *ISI Web of Science* on “arts-based research” and “music education” yielded a total of 10-14 results. “Arts-based research” and “early childhood” only provided 2-7 results, primarily on arts-based learning in research. The same search with arts-based educational research revealed the same tendency.

² In this article, aesthetic experience could be encounters with both nature and art. Art experiences, whether in music or other art genres, involve some type of art medium formed by human beings.

only in the subject matter, but also in the method, context, outcome and dissemination (Vist, in press). As Eisner puts it:

We come to understand the world in many ways; the arts are among these many ways. Their virtual absence in the methodology of educational research is a significant shortcoming in the way in which we may be able to understand what goes on (...). (Eisner, 2008a, p. 11)

Eisner claims that since the second half of the 20th century, it has become increasingly clear that knowledge and understanding are not always reducible to language – even more so in early childhood, I would add. With Merleau-Ponty's (1945/2002) embodied perception, Polanyi's (1983) tacit knowing, Johnson's (1990) embodied meaning, reason and knowledge, and the thinking and reflection in the aesthetic media mentioned above, I strongly support Eisner's (2008a, p. 5) claim of a "deliteralization of knowledge" as significant because "it opens the door for multiple forms of knowing," including in research.

Method on method

Since method permeates the entire article, methodological issues will be discussed throughout, also giving the article a less traditional format. The article's methodological foundation leans in particular on Elliot Eisner and his colleagues' arts-based research (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008; Eisner, 1993, 2008b; Eisner & Powell, 2002) and on *a/r/tography* (Irwin & de Cosson, 2002; Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzouasis, 2008). The ABR processes presented are exemplified by my own experiences in ABR in the project, *Searching for Qualities: Relation – play – aesthetics - learning 2012-2017*.³ The examples include participation in dance and music performance as thinking or reflection tools, and an arts-based data collection method called "the aesthetic interview" (Vist, 2014a).

Although focusing on early phases of research, in *writing* about these phases, my experiences still become "data" – analysed, discussed and disseminated in this article. Coloured by my arts-based stance, I have chosen to present some of the examples as narratives. Writing in a language that is not my mother tongue, I will never reach the same literal sensitivity as if it was my first language, but the narrative form is too valuable to be abandoned due to literary qualities. Another choice has to do with the researcher's role and transparency in narratives: In traditional research, one often avoids the word "I", if possible. Being the researcher *and* the writer, inquiring and writing about my own methodological experiences, the best point of view in the narrative seemed to be a first person point of view, with the researcher being the "I". This also affords transparency about whose experience is being presented. In order to limit the rather dominant focus on the researcher, I experiment in other parts of the project with some of the children being the first person *and* the main character (then obviously also creating other layers of interpretation in the narratives).

Theories and concepts

According to Bresler (2008, p. 227), "The scholar who first framed the arts explicitly as a model not only for knowledge, but for the *process* of inquiry, was Elliot Eisner." The term *arts-based research*⁴

³ The project, led by Prof. Leif Hernes, is funded by The Research Council of Norway, and focuses on kindergarten children under the age of three, see <http://www.hioa.no/eng/content/view/full/18459>

⁴ Eisner uses the term arts[-]based, both with (Eisner, 2008b) and without (Barone & Eisner, 2012) a hyphen, though the content seems to not be influenced by the hyphen.

(ABR) can be traced back to 1993 (Barone & Eisner, 2012), and is sometimes used as an umbrella term for arts in research (Bresler, 2006; Finley, 2008; Leavy, 2009). As such, it could be defined as qualitative research that draws inspiration, concepts, processes and representational forms from the arts, exploring the “alternative researching possibilities that fuse the creative and imaginative possibilities of the arts with social science research” (Knowles & Cole, 2008, p. xi). In an educational context, the term arts-based *educational* research (ABER) is also used. Due to the chosen literature, I decided to stay with ABR. According to Barone and Eisner (2012, p. 1), “[a]rts based research is an effort to extend beyond the limiting constraints of discursive communication in order to express meanings that otherwise would be ineffable.” The genres emphasize meaning rather than facts and certainty, being more interested in questions, potential and possibilities than clear answers. As may be revealed here, this can also challenge the traditional way of discussion in a scientific article.

However, ABR “implies a continuum that extends from qualitative research projects that (...) effectively deploy a few aesthetic design elements to those who exhibit maximum artistry” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 24). Confirming this continuum, Rasmussen (2013) also claims that the field is still unfinished and experimenting with various terminologies, philosophies and practices of science. For instance, *Artistic research*, placing itself close to arts practice, is primarily used by professional/educated artists contributing to the art world, inquiring about works of art, (Borgdorff, 2012; Hannula, Suoranta, & Vadén, 2005; Jullander, 2013). Hovik (2014) puts herself within this tradition, investigating theatre events for children from birth to three years of age. At the other end of the research continuum, *aesthetically based research* (Bresler, 2006) place itself closer to regular qualitative research. Fredriksen (2013) – inspired by Bresler – also talks about aesthetically based research, although her research within visual art practices in Norwegian ECEC is also “inspired by arts-based educational research and ART-ography” (Fredriksen, 2011, p. [iii]).

Arts-based research

Barone and Eisner (2012, p. ix) explain ABR as a kind of qualitative, social research “guided by aesthetic features.” Some of these features are the *artistic modes of thought* (Eisner & Powell, 2002, p. 135). Interviewing social scientists about artistry in their science and the way their research is conceptualized and designed, *empathic knowledge* and *imagination* appear as being of specific importance. “The arts make such empathic participation possible because they create forms that are evocative and compelling”, according to Barone and Eisner (2012, p. 3). In her aesthetically based research (2006), Bresler similarly talks about the potential of the arts to cultivate *habits of mind* that are directly relevant to the processes and products of qualitative research. Besides empathy and imagination, she also emphasizes *systematic improvisation*, *embodiment* and *sensitivity towards qualities* (Bresler, 2006, 2008). Thus, arts encounters may also become important in preparing the researcher’s perception, analysis and reflection in traditional qualitative research.

Furthermore, the method encourages the use of different art media. ABR “exploits the capacities of expressive form” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 5), and is “enabling others to *vicariously reexperience the world*,” by using “the expressive qualities of an artistic medium to convey meanings that are otherwise unavailable” Barone and Eisner claim (2012, p. 20). A work of ABR should potentially invite others “into the experiencing aspects of a world that may have been otherwise outside their range of sight” (*ibid.*, p. 56). Yet another feature of artistry in science is the use of the physical body as a source of information, which has the potential to generate a heightened sensory and emotional experience and a somatic form of knowledge (Eisner & Powell, 2002).

ABR is not only practiced by professional artists. However, since different arts use different forms of representation, the form (i.e. media) could be said to impose constraints on its performers, which are stimulating and fruitful if you know the media, and restraining and inhibiting if you do not.

The capacity for inviting an audience into experiences and new understanding demands competencies related to the art medium, both technically and as a symbol system.

A/r/tography

A/r/tography is a practitioner- and ABR methodology (Jevic & Springgay, 2008) that more clearly merges the “a”rtmaking, “r”esearching and “t”eaching. Hence, the methodology pays an interesting amount of attention to the *in-between*. As the “graphy” indicates, this genre also emphasizes writing, though a/r/tographers are primarily “artist-and-teachers-and-researchers who examine educational phenomena through an artistic understanding and inquiry process” (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2008, p. 87).

A/r/tography is similar to action research in that its participants are deeply committed to (changing) practice, and, like other arts-based genres, emphasizes meaning rather than facts. This also creates a meaning making that can be disturbing, unexpected and hesitant, a learning that is nonlinear, dynamic, relational, unpredictable, participatory and evolutionary (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2008). Inquiring into educational phenomena, a/r/tography is also concerned with self-study, being involved in community and relational and ethical topics. The concept of *métissage* is used as a metaphor for artist-researcher-teachers who integrate these roles into their personal and professional lives. Thus, the a/r/tographer “embrace a *métissage* existence that integrates knowing, doing and making” (Irwin, 2004, p. 29).

A/r/tography also uses Deleuze and Guattari’s (2009) concept of *rhizome*⁵ to describe an assemblage that activates the in-between, and which invites us to explore the interstitial spaces of art making, researching and teaching. Inspired by Bourriaud’s (1998/2002) relational aesthetics, Irwin and Springgay see the meaning as not emerging from the artwork itself or by the artist alone, but as a situation in which the artwork, a/r/tographer and public are mutually confronted and interrogated. Research becomes a process of exchange that “emerges through an intertwining of mind and body, self and other, and through our interactions with the world” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, pp. xxi-xxii). As a result, a/r/tographers have an understanding of research as intercorporeality, relationality and process. As in Eisner’s approach above, artists engaged in a/r/tography do not need to be professional artists, but they have to be committed to artistic engagement through an ongoing living inquiry, to be attentive to their artist, researcher and teacher selves. I find the term a/r/tographer useful, although I may not agree that everything defined as a/r/tography is best described as research.

Arts-based research processes

(...)Friday afternoon, the second week of fieldwork and the very last day before beginning the aesthetic interviews. All the children were playing outdoors. Several of them were sitting in the nest swing. When I came by, most of them loudly demanded me to “puuuush.” Only Niels looked sceptical, but he did stay on board. I placed myself so I did not come too close to Niels in the pushes, singing and swinging the children as so many times before. Later, when the children slide off the swing, Niels hooked one leg on each side of the chain fastener, and seconds from injuring himself, I grabbed him and put him in position of sliding down without any danger. He was deeply offended. Screaming in accordance with the heavy insult he experienced this to be, he left the swing and ran towards another adult. I decided it was

⁵ Using the term *rhizome* allows for approaches in research that are non-linear, non-hierarchical and multiple. The tree, following a linear pattern, has been the dominant ontological model in Western thought; however, it does not offer an adequate explanation of multiplicity. On the other hand, the rhizome (more like a ginger root) does not have a beginning or end, and not even a centre. Any point of a rhizome can be connected to any other, and “it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2009, p. 25).

probably best not to invite him into the interview room. (...)(Elaborated log from fieldwork 2014)

Here, I present and discuss my ABR processes in *Searching for Qualities*.⁶ There might be a tendency not to verbally reveal the arts' place in research (Vist, 2015). Furthermore, "there are still more researchers writing *about* ABR criteria than those producing examples of what it looks like," (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008, p. 12), thereby giving me an additional argument for this presentation. However, following the idea of living as an a/r/tographer, it will not always be easy to define what is- and what is not part of research, nor what is- and what is not arts-based, and in particular: which research phase it belongs to. Since my research is related to aesthetic learning and emotion knowledge (in addition to methodological issues), life gives impulses to research almost every day, hence clearly affording an opportunity for a lived inquiry.

In the beginning of the project, the log was written sporadically, not explicitly seen as data collection, but as a way to not forget my thoughts – for later verbal use. Subsequent to this, during the formal data collection phase in kindergarten, a log was written systematically after each visit (in addition to the videotaped interviews). In both phases, the literal form of the log varied, from short neutral tags or theoretically loaded sentences to poetic metaphors and sentences with an energy familiar to fiction. Due to the lack of time, the content was written down as fast as possible. Writing this methodological article, this log is presented as "empirical data", re-written, "analysed and disseminated" in the narratives. Thus, some elements from later research phases also necessarily occur, but the article's focus is on the early phases of research, exemplified by participation in dance and music performance as thinking or reflection tools in research and the data collection method "the aesthetic interview."

Beginning research by playing music

In an earlier research project, playing piano together with a cellist, and later also with another pianist, helped me to develop my thoughts and reflections, even my research- and interview questions (Vist, 2009). Therefore, I have also played instruments in this project, intentionally as part of arts-based reflection processes. In the article, I am bound to the verbal language, but the embodied experience by the instruments exceeds the verbal meanings, and increases the span of what I can manage to put into words.

At a very early stage, I invited a professional classical violinist⁷ to play with me. The purpose was to reflect upon emotion interaction, and more specifically to focus on my own embodied experiences – and on a meta-level to help explore this kind of investigation as a research tool or methodology. As written in my logbook, my co-musician's improvisational qualities and surprising musical turns made me for an instant "feel like a child thrown in the air," and "comfortably and safely caught every time." This created a clearly sensuous and embodied kind of joy, on top of the more traditional aesthetic appreciation coming from the high quality of the violinist's playing. The happening afforded interesting verbal and nonverbal reflections on different parts of the aesthetic experience, as well as the roles of adults and children, while interacting aesthetically. Embodied concepts such as trust, freedom, surprise and abandonment were investigated in ways other than what came to mind in front of my computer or reading literature.

An important function of my logbook appeared in this phase to be as a connecting-, even transitional link, between the aesthetical reflections done *within* music and the more traditional verbal

⁶ One of my contributions in *Searching for Qualities* is the sub-project "The aesthetic interview", named so due to the developed data collection method. However, several other arts-based processes have also appeared in this sub-project, and will be used as examples here.

⁷ Jan Bjøranger, violin professor at the University of Stavanger and artistic director of IB1.

reflection and thinking afforded in a prepositional medium as in scientific writing (Vist, 2009, 2015). I did not get away from the experience of a strong and embodied thinking and reflection directly in the musical medium. Writing the log helped me to "translate" these experiences into words to a certain extent, although not as anything close to a one-to-one relationship. This duality (in view of the thought and language) may also be seen as a rhizomatic in-between, a type of abductive back and forth process between the art medium and the verbal language. What happened is described by Todres as "between the 'more' of experiencing and the differentiations of language", and "a productive process of more refined understanding" (2011, p. 26).

Dancing as part of the arts-based tool case

Another arts-based process that started in the design phase was dancing. I had previously experienced how salsa could give valuable impulses for different reflections related to emotion knowledge (Vist, 2007, 2009). A few tango lessons in 2011 revealed a special energy in the interaction between the leader and follower in this dance, affording reflections upon human interaction, which was also relevant when reflecting on the interaction between caregiver and child. Preparing for the emotion interaction themes in the data collection, I decided to start dancing tango regularly in 2012. Since salsa and tango are both social dances, primarily danced by adults, and with a clearly adult sensual energy as part of their character and aesthetic quality, I decided to attend classes in modern dance as well, giving me yet another contrasting embodied language. It definitely gave me a more varied tool case, but more importantly, it gave me a heightened consciousness about distinctive communicative and energetic aspects in dance generally, and a chance to reflectively using them in a better way in relation to emotion knowledge and interaction in ECEC.

My encounters with modern dance ended after the first semester. Tango, on the other hand, got me "hooked." It did not take long before the focus was on developing my technical, relational and musical tango skills – almost ignoring the early childhood researcher part of the a/r/tographer. The notes in the log became rare or absent, and my mind was fully occupied with the aesthetic experience of learning the dance, even how to teach it. Should I still consider tango as part of my research? Following the ideas of ABR, it is this question and the discussion that is the most important, and not the answer:

Firstly, with the art media's evocative and compelling qualities, it could be normal to forget the analytical researcher and systematic log writing from time to time. Consequently, it may also be a natural process that the "a", the "t" or the "r" is disappearing for a while. How can self-study – necessary in a/r/tography – be possible if you are not allowed to "forget yourself" and "merge" into the arts? Will not going in and out of such an experience be what gives the researcher the energy to stay with it for a while, to commit deeply and to develop the necessary skills in the art medium? On the other hand, if this is part of my research, what is not? In accordance with a post-modern acknowledgement of the *whole* truth not being possible to present, not everything that influences the same truth can be presented either. However, writing this paragraph in a scientific article, is it not to be considered as a part of my research? In another article, five a/r/tographers claim that...

By pausing for a tentative postlude within our ongoing a/r/tographic project, we are recognizing the rhizomatic nature of our inquiry. With the rhizomatic form, this article becomes another situation in the journey. (Irwin, Beer, Springgay, Grauer, & Xiong, 2006, p. 85).

I could claim the same while dancing tango, as well as while writing about the tango experience here.

Secondly, we have the formal ethical issues. In my mandatory information to the NSD,⁸ I did not say anything about me dancing the tango as part of the project. Defining the tango outside of research, due to the originally missing aspect in the application to the NSD, would be an unacceptable ethical twist. The tango *did* happen, and entering the discourse of a/r/tography, the tango definitely became part of my lived inquiry. I contacted the NSD again to give the necessary information about this matter. Acknowledging such “distant circles” of ABR processes, one also has to take into account whether more ‘distant circles of fellow human beings’ do or do not become informants, thus also needing to be informed and to give their consent.

Thirdly, if an underreporting of arts-based tools is still typical in our research discourse (Vist, 2015), I may still be blind to the degree of importance that the arts-based processes have. Hence, is it not better to report it, and for the future readers and reviewers, to evaluate if this was correct? Writing this, the tango’s role as a reflective tool in the project is again more explicit. My recent tango focus has been on learning to be a leader, which is traditionally the men’s role. Again, having two different aesthetic expressions (as a leader and follower) provides a research tool case with distinctively different affordances in the thinking and reflection regarding arts-based methodology, aesthetic learning and emotion knowledge. New thoughts, especially on sensitivity, energy, interaction and care have developed while dancing:

I am now practicing the leader’s (man’s) role in tango. Dancing with a more experienced follower, my body changed from “screaming” the communication to “whispering” it. Details in my chest movements were enough to lead the follower’s leg in delicate low boleos (small kicks). It put images into my head about screaming and whispering as a general issue in communication; how subtle communication can be when adults communicating with small children do not feel the need to scream – literally as well as metaphorically. Some days later, dancing with another experienced follower, I was reminded of this again, when my newly experienced level of “whispering” movements helped me to make the follower do what she did not do while I was still “screaming” the same in very clear and big movements. I got an image in my head about an experienced male dancer and his extraordinarily subtle style, and the kind of care and warmth that is given space in his movements. I want to continue exploring this caring, delicate subtleness in tango, in aesthetic interviews, and as a concept of emotion knowledge in my rather noisy Western world. (Elaborated log 2014)

If learning is accepted as being nonlinear, dynamic, relational, unpredictable, participatory and evolutionary (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2008), the research-based knowledge and the path it takes will be the same. Not everything I do is research, but what in my life that does not have an influence on my research, is hard to say.

The aesthetic interview

When investigating children under the age of three, interviewing seems like a bad idea. However, we communicate with our children from the day they are born, we share meaning, through, voice, pulse, rhythm, gesture, movement, etc.; through our communicative musicality (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009). Dialogue is not dependent on verbal competence.

Keeping the relational qualities from the interview at the forefront, the aesthetic interview is an arts-based data collection method, in which interaction is performed and data constructed mainly through the arts. The interviews do not exclude verbal communication, but art-based media and communication play the main role (Vist, 2014a). The arguments for aesthetic interviews in early

⁸ Norwegian Social Science Data Services.

childhood research are grounded in phenomenology (Løkken, 2000; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2002), theories of embodiment, tacit knowledge and relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 1998/2002; Johnson, 1990, 2007; Polanyi, 1983). Although inspired by principles from the research interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), and Lie and Ski's (1995) non-verbal interview, it could also be considered a kind of (and inspired by) participant video observation (Løkken, 2012).

Since I spent two weeks in the kindergarten before conducting the interviews, getting to know the children, the interviewer definitely became an artist-researcher-teacher – even caregiver. However, due to the kindergarten leader asking me to come three months earlier than originally planned, the conducted aesthetic interviews were performed with little artistic preparation in advance.⁹ The “questions” were not fully composed “works of art,” but rather improvisational ideas affording development on-site, in-between the art media and the participants, as in Bourriaud's relational aesthetics and Irvin and Springgay's a/r/tography. This gave the children room for some initiative and creativity, but the evocative and transcendental aspect of a high-quality artwork was not put at the forefront. In the next round of interviews, the plan is to prepare more carefully in advance, seeing each of the research questions as distinct micro art productions. The understanding of the intercorporeality, relationality and other aesthetic processes that appear during the interviews may benefit from a more detailed and thorough practice on the part of the interviewer-artist, but room for improvisation must remain – maybe even be practiced in advance.

Although I have my competence in music, with these young children drama, dance, music and poetry – even visual arts – merge in the interviews, as they do elsewhere in the children's lives. Almost any art encounter could be seen as an interview question, singing, dancing, playing instruments or presenting other artefacts. With the elder children, the interview questions can be more verbal, but still encourage arts-based answers, such as when a five-year-old was given the soloist role as a singer, improvising into the microphone on the topic, “I remember when I was little,” accompanied by a six-year-old drummer. In the conducted interviews, the djembe (big drum) was part of several questions, affording the toddlers the chance to investigate and express themselves in a way that reveals technical, aesthetic and emotional knowledge. The djembe was standing in the interview room, inviting the child(ren) to explore all its affordances – tactile, visual and musical – when we entered the room. Moreover, using the djembe in a traditional way, the researcher “asked questions”, drumming and communicating with the children, getting answers about their musical, motor, emotional and social competencies. Bringing a djembe to kindergarten the first day of interviews, the appearance and sound of it clearly motivated the children to visit the interview room. Even Niels came:

(...) After two weeks of participant observation, the camerawoman and I closed the door to one of the playrooms, starting the aesthetic interviews. The very first day, after standing outside the door for a while and listening to the sound of the first two interviews (the other adults told me), Niels rushed into the room together with a friend, talking with me about the djembe in the middle of the room, clearly wanting to play. Any need for distance had disappeared; we were playing and dancing together for 30 minutes. At one point, he even repeatedly put a rhythm egg under his sweater, inviting me to take it out, over and over again. (...) Later the same day in the middle of another interview, he sneaked in again, running directly towards me and jumped into my lap. (Elaborated log and video from fieldwork, 2014)

⁹ The conducted data collection consisted of approximately 40 video recorded aesthetic interviews (of 12 one- and two-year-olds, three of them celebrating their third birthday during my stay), lasting from 1–33 minutes (average of 14 minutes).

Further discussions

As described earlier, the procedures employed by artists may also improve the habits of mind or modes of thought while conducting regular qualitative research (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Bresler, 2006). If so, improvisation, empathic knowledge, embodiment, imagination, etc. should be viable in the arts-based processes above. An *empathic mode* is also well known in regular interviews (Eisner & Powell, 2002; Fog, 2001; Vist, 2009), and when interviewing children, seeing children as subjects (Bae, 2009; Eide & Winger, 2003), it seems rather mandatory. In the aesthetic interviews, empathy also became necessary for a fluent dialogue, as did *embodiment* (Bresler, 2006). With empathy being the capacity to recognize and feel the (also bodily) emotions of another, this may appear a bit redundant. Nevertheless, the researcher's mode in the aesthetic interviews appeared – at least in the good moments – as an empathic and embodied imagination expressed and improvised in aesthetic media as well as in words. My full body became both my ears and my mouth while communicating with the children, expressing – and improvising upon – thoughts and reflections, in addition to feelings and actions. Again, this also could appear in regular qualitative research. However, in ABR, the art media strengthen and increase the mode “because they create forms that are evocative and compelling” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 3), which also has the potential to generate a heightened sensory and emotional experience (Eisner & Powell, 2002). The conducted interviews confirmed this, but it does not come automatically simply because arts-based media are in use. The videos clearly expose opportunities for follow-up questions and other responses that did not appear, due to me, the interviewer, not being sensitive and empathic enough.

If the arts have a special potential to promote such habits of minds, it should be of special importance for researchers to experience arts and practice this as part of their research training, especially in relation to ECEC. Playing piano and dancing tango, then, is not enough. Practicing art encounters together with children in a similar context, and with same-aged children as the children one plans to interview, seems to be equally important. Barone and Eisner's claim of competence in the art media in use is underscored, as is the context/situatedness and a/r/tographic in-between: This competence is not only about technique in the art media, but technique using the art media in relevant relations and contexts. Hence, what are habits of mind and habits in art media merge as well; much like the *métissage* existence described by the a/r/tographers above.

To exemplify this merging, let us go back to my aforementioned log notes: The empathic and embodied imagination was clearly explicit in me being thrown in the air while accompanying the violinist. With the violinist's unexpected musical turns, there was definitely a need for sensitivity towards subtle qualities in the improvisation, even in the written classical music we played.¹⁰ In the aesthetic interviews, the open design likewise challenged my competence for improvisation. Moreover, the balance between sensitivity towards qualities, empathy, embodiment and improvisation skills may be important in both designs.

Barone and Eisner's claim about the arts as evocative and compelling, and the underlying relationship between the arts and emotion, is fully discussed elsewhere (e.g. Dissanayake, 2001; Juslin & Sloboda, 2010; Langer, 1942/1979; Stern, 1985/2000). Here, I will point to the three-part narrative with Niels as it developed during the two weeks of observation and the subsequent videotaped interview. Would this dramatic change in Niels' behaviour towards me have happened without the tempting sounds from the djembe? It is my contention that his *rapid* change from sceptical to trustful relates to the meaningful, evocative and compelling qualities of the music, especially the djembe. It afforded him a chance to go beyond his usual social “horizon”; hence, this methodological approach seemed to possess the aforementioned capacity for inviting Niels into the experiencing aspects of a

¹⁰ Rachmaninov's “Vocalize” and Monti's “Czardas.”

world. “Does this work permit me to enter into dialogue?” Bourriaud (1998/2002, p. 109) asks, discussing art encounters as relational aesthetics. In this perspective, whether the arts-based approach is useful or not depends upon the research question, whether it is inviting the child into dialogue, “giving it life, complementing the work, and taking part in the formulation of its meaning” (ibid., p. 59). The narrative also shows the various qualities of different data collecting methods (participant observation and aesthetic interview) within a fieldwork in ECEC, and the importance of a varied methodological tool case.

If the qualities in arts encounters afford a re-experiencing of the world, the energy gives the encounters a heightened meaning and value. The same qualities would also afford an opportunity for reflection, thereby revealing the meaning of reflection as emotional-, as well as intellectual mirroring and thinking (Johnson, 1990, 2007; Vist, 2009). The arts-based encounters afforded Niels different emotional expressions and social actions, while the piano- and tango-based encounters afforded me a non-verbal reflection upon the research topics that was different from the one I found sitting in front of a computer or book. This adds an intellectual layer to the embodied and emotional ones, although separating the three is not only undesirable (i.e. the a/r/tographic merging above), but also impossible (Damasio, 1996).

If our arts-based tools are particularly compelling, do we have to consider special ethical aspects when working with *arts-based* research? If even regular qualitative interview questions become what Fog (2001) describes as Trojan horses, the arts-based questions may make the interviewee expose him/herself even more, thus communicating information he/she may regret later on. Fog’s use of the term “seduced” is interesting, even more so in relation to the arts and the one- and two-year-olds’ need in trusting the adults surrounding them.

Conclusion

In this methodological article, arts-based research processes like participation in dance and music performance, “the aesthetic interview” and narrative writing are seen to contribute in ECEC research. Despite the fact that ABR includes projects only deploying a few aesthetic design elements, in addition to projects exhibiting maximum artistry, I often end up using the term ABR *processes*. The “works of art” from the interviewing, writing, playing and dancing are not the “culmination” of the projects (Barone & Eisner, 2012); they are simply tools and documentations of the qualitative research processes, mirroring my reflection and thinking.

The capacity for inviting members of an audience into evocative, (re)experiences of their world was described as a core issue in ABR. This demands competencies – both technical and others – related to the art medium in use. The presented processes confirm such a claim; the researcher must be able to meet a certain threshold of quality in the art media in use, which may also have consequences for the preparation and education of researchers. However, in the different arts-based tools, and related to what is the aim for the specific tool in use, the demands for qualifications may vary. There may even be situations in which the amateur can reveal a valuable but different type of knowledge, thereby following the argument that knowledge is always contextual and situated. My competence in music gave me a better tool to use in the communication with the children, thus also yielding more detailed interview data to analyse. Being an amateur dancer, however, gave me another opportunity to investigate emotional interactions (and how an inexperienced body can stand in the way). My reflections would probably have been different if I had had no problems with my own dancing. Hence, using arts-based methods as reflection tools in the early phases of the research may have been beneficial, despite varying qualifications.

Without any ambitions of communicating the research results primarily through arts-based media, ABR might benefit in the earlier phases through both a wider range of research questions and a

larger number of researchers. In research dissemination, formal artistic competencies may become more important for the quality, communication and aesthetic validity of the research. Still, the discussion about the relationship between aesthetical and scientific quality is important, with competence in art media being one issue. According to Cahnmann-Taylor, there is very little explicit training for current and future researchers to practice arts-based methods of inquiry. That is a problem – again for the research quality and for what I choose to call aesthetic validity, also because “[w]ithout explicit training, there can be no critical community to establish what constitutes quality in arts-based research” (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008, p. 11).

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