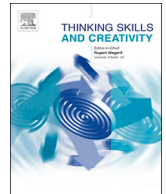


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Performing difference in/through dance: The significance of dialogical, or third spaces in creating conditions for learning and living together

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to explore the notion of performing difference in/through dance, specifically in the context of dance education. By unraveling theories pertaining to performance, performativity, difference, and identity, and then connecting these with the notion of dialogical, or third space as a particular condition for pedagogical encounters in dance, the authors aim to illuminate the significance of performing difference for individuals and communities. The central motivating query for this research essay is: How could the notion of performing difference in the context of dance education lean on and lead towards dialogical, or third spaces as source of learning and living together? We propose that dance education that is framed this way may be deeply about democratic life within diverse and sustainable communities. Thus, we claim that dance has educational potential beyond learning dance.

1. Introduction

In this article we explore the notion of performing difference in/through dance. Our aim is to articulate the meaning of this notion especially in the context of dance education. Further, our purpose is to unravel the conditions that make it possible for young people to perform difference through dance. We discuss how dialogue, both as a philosophical premise and as pedagogical practice may be the key for creating such conditions. As we contemplate how dialogue creates safe spaces for young people to perform difference, we also discuss how performing difference reinforces such spaces. We widen the philosophical and theoretical foundation for dialogical pedagogy, often substantiated by Buber's (1937/1970, 1947) and Freire's (1972, 1996, 1998) work, by adjoining it with the post-colonial notion of the third space (Bhabha, 1994). As we liken dialogical spaces to third spaces, we explore the deeper meanings and possibilities of such spaces for young people to discover their creative and expressive potential. Leaning on theories pertaining to performance, performativity, difference, and identity, we investigate dance education as an embodied, performative practice that might support the development of fluid identities and diverse communities for youth. The broad overarching question motivating this investigation is: How could the notion of performing difference in the context of dance education lean on and lead towards dialogical, or third spaces as source of learning and living together?

Our investigation is prompted by the paradox that we have observed in our communities and societies around the globe: an increasing polarization is happening both between nations and between people within nations. This is partly due to growing

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immigration from and to specific parts of the world, but can also be attributed to events such as the global economic crisis, which has created greater social inequality and has resulted in people feeling insecure and anxious about their future. Thus, as diversity is increasing, the pressure, and in turn the anxiety, for sameness also seems to be growing. We see evidence of pressure towards conformity, polarization of worldviews and ideologies, and binaries that divide rather than connect people. As a result populist and xenophobic expressions have entered more mainstream political discourse around the world, for example contributing to increasing occurrences of and forums for hate speech. The issues of polarization and growing diversity have been brought to the fore previously by several authors (see for example: Cooper, 2004; Richardson, 2005). With the rise of populist policies around the globe this issue seems to become more acute than ever (Mason, 2015; Rowe, Martin, Buck, & Anttila, 2018). For young people, increasing pressure towards sameness is potentially detrimental, especially when taking into account the largely unknown effects on “performing” and constructing identities in and through social media and the virtual world. As dance educators, we are sensitive towards threats that contemporary lifestyles pose on our bodies and thus, are driven by the need to understand “our interactions with digital media is embodied and they have bodily effect at the physical level” (Hayles, 2012, 3). In this article, we take a critical view on the notion of identity as a phenomenon that rests upon categories grounded within observable traits and qualities, upon the need to identify characteristics that unite or separate, and upon belonging based on similarities and exclusion based on that which is different. We will seek to understand the challenges of identity construction in the digital era, discuss the pressures towards conformity that are related to current societal trends, including populism, consumerism and digitalization, and finally, propose how these challenges could and should be encountered in the context of dance education.

We see the tendency towards sameness, or erasure of difference, problematic from multiple viewpoints. The reason for exclusion, harassment and discrimination is often some kind of externally identifiable difference, which is often based on cultural constructs. Such differences are often seen as potentially dangerous and the safe position for an individual is to be ‘average’ or ‘same as others’ (Gordon, Holland, & Lahelma, 2000, 131–132). Marginalising and eliminating that which is different is also associated with totalitarianism, and is a dangerous pattern, even in contemporary societies (May, 1997, 1–4). We ask, would it be possible to “celebrate” difference and ambiguity, to work against erasure of difference, through embodied encounters in the context of dance education? In this discussion, we also see a possibility of reconstructing essentialistic, modernist views of creativity as an individual, subjective capacity. We are interested in replacing this kind of educational thought with views that see creativity as an emergent, reciprocal process that takes place within shared social spaces, “in-between”. We consider such emergent cultural expressions creative, although they are not individual self-expressions and thus, are not tied to the modernist notions of “subject” or “self.”

In this investigation we have studied literature from several fields by a number of authors, seeking to explore and establish the theoretical terrain for articulating the notion of performing difference. We have also engaged in negotiations among ourselves in an attempt to find a common ground and articulate our intentions first to each other, then to prospective readers. This collaborative process has resulted in a rather rich fabric of thoughts where different theoretical sources intersect. Not all views are compatible with each other – the same concept might have different meanings depending on the author. This is especially true with the notion of difference, a concept with multiple meanings.

In the following, we first discuss theories related to performing and performativity. Moving on towards philosophies of difference where our main thrust comes from Gilles Deleuze’s positive philosophy of difference that strives toward multiplicities and possibilities in life and the world rather than toward (negative) categorical difference that makes a separation or distinction between things. Then, we look towards Bhabha’s (1994) notion of the third space, a concept that we see aligned with dialogical spaces, hence our articulation of ‘dialogical (third) spaces’ as a location for exploration. We also briefly visit Bhabha’s views on cultural difference, identity and otherness, as they seem relevant for building our case. These theoretical pairings and the resulting patchwork of philosophical perspectives is undeniably eclectic. However, we see that through selecting a variety of viewpoints there is the potential to support the understanding and appreciation of the ever-continuing process of differentiation in and through dance, and also, in dance education scholarship. Simultaneously, we see that the fields of dance and arts education are multi-disciplinary, therefore we perceive a need for diverse theories to articulate the complexities of the field. Following on from our theoretical and philosophical investigation we discuss concrete pedagogical implications for dance education practices.

2. Performing: life and art intertwined

It is challenging to synthesize the many meanings of performance, performing, and performativity into a clear conceptual structure. The insights generated within the dynamically developing field of performance studies (Fisher-Lichte, 2008; Schechner, 2006; Turner, 1982) seem to not have been fully embraced by dance educators, potentially because of the diverse meanings of these terms and the ephemeral nature in which they are presented. For practitioners and scholars alike, these concepts seem to refer either to performance qualities within everyday life, where artistic, creative or theatrical meanings carry less weight, or vice versa; the emphasis or purpose of dance education being on art-making as creative-practice. We find that this binary limits the possibilities that dance education as embodied, performative practice might have for individuals, communities and societies. Moreover, it is not always clear in dance education scholarship, what is meant by these terms as “performance” may also refer to execution of movement, in the context of discussing motor skills or dance technique, or even to physical endurance. Coupled with these concerns, the issue of virtual contexts for performing raise new questions for all educators, including dance educators. For example, how should we incorporate digital technology in our classes, and how can we safeguard our students from becoming too exposed when sharing their creative work in digital forms? Our aim is to clarify, weave and bridge these views so that we can see performance/performing as a significant element of human life on a continuum, or rather, a plait where everyday life and art are interwoven. More specifically, we view that what occurs in dance learning environments is closely connected to what takes place outside of these situations, and that

traces extend between these different contexts. We attend to the significance of even the most mundane expressions and see them as seed that may develop towards flexible identities, diverse communities, renewing of cultural practices and events, as well as new works of art. In our view this intricate, often knotty plait needs to be better understood for the purposes of contemporary dance education practices, as performing may have both desirable and undesirable consequences for young people.

Our work begins by revisiting the sociologist Goffman's (1959) well known notion of "life as performance" (17). Goffman's dramaturgical approach, where he utilized the analogy between theatrical stage and everyday life, portrays human beings as actors who play a role. According to Goffman's analysis, social situations where other people observe people are analogous to being on stage, and humans are able to consciously modify their performance according to social cues. He uses the term performance to refer to all actions that have observers and that have some effect on the observers. Performance and outer appearances define the individual also as a member of a community and social class. The different activities and acts in society can be viewed as performances of everyday life. Goffman (1959) also utilizes theatrical terms of front and back stage, and claims that human beings create these fronts depending on the type of social stage (situation) and the other actors present. The 'front' is meant to project a certain image of the actor and it can be manipulated in many ways, for example through setting, appearance, and manner. These social performances support individuals in their effort to 'fit in' to society and achieve personal goals. They differ from traditional theatrical performances in that the performer is simultaneously audience for other performers, being affected by and affecting them. Often, the aim of these social performances is to set the individual in best light. Goffman also discusses how these performances may go wrong, and how individuals are coping with these situations. Moreover, he claims that there is no true self behind the performer. The back stage is the private area for an individual to prepare for the performance, but is it where s/he can be himself or herself? For us, the focal question is not how to support young people in "finding themselves" or constructing coherent fixed identities. Rather, we are focusing on the settings, appearances, and manners that we provide for young people to explore their potential, and ask, who makes decisions on what kinds of performances are or are not acceptable for them within such settings, appearances, manners and creative expression? Countering social norms that may be invisible but still effective in regulating young persons' embodied expressions seems for us crucial in fostering fluidity.

The idea of fluidity, particularly in relation to construction of identities in relation to gender, through repeated and culturally regulated acts has been extensively studied by renowned feminist philosopher Butler (1988, 1990). According to Butler, philosophers have a discourse of 'acts' that maintains associative semantic meanings with theories of performance and acting. The aim is to explain the mundane ways in which social agents constitute social reality through language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic social sign. Gender identity—and we would like to add, any type of identity—is instituted through a stylized repetition of acts, including stylization of the body, that is, through "bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (1988, 519). For Butler, this view departs from a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of a constituted social temporality, and is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo, witnessed and believed by a mundane social audience (1988, 520). Similar to Goffman's thinking, Butler claims that there is no (gendered) self prior to these acts. She does not deny the existence and facticity of the material or natural dimensions of the body, instead, she emphasizes the process by which the body comes to bear cultural and historical meanings and possibilities. Understanding this process requires "an expansion of the conventional view of acts to mean both that which *constitutes meaning* and that through which *meaning is performed or enacted* ... the acts by which gender is constituted bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts" (1988, 521, italics added). In our view, these ideas shared by scholars such as Goffman and Butler are not always explicit in dance education contexts. Despite the growing awareness on normative traditions of dance as a gendered practice and a steady movement towards cultural sensitivity within dance education and community dance research (Buck & Barbour, 2007; Houston, 2005; Melchior, 2011; Rowe, Buck, & Martin, 2015; Shapiro, 1998; Stinson, 1998; Sööt, 2018), change in pedagogical practices is slow. This can be witnessed for example in the context of dance studio recitals, various dance events and dance competitions (see, e.g., Anttila, 2013; Schupp, 2018).

The way that the body bears meaning is fundamentally dramatic. For Butler (1988), "the body is not merely matter but a continual and incessant *materializing* of possibilities. One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body and, indeed, one does one's body differently from one's contemporaries and from one's embodied predecessors and successors as well" (521). She sees gender as a corporeal style, a both intentional and performative 'act', where the body is a historical situation, and a manner of doing, dramatizing, and reproducing historical situation (1988, 521). In our view, all identifying categories, such as disabled/abled, western/non-western, white/non-white, can be similarly examined by utilizing Butler's notion of corporeal style. Her view of the body as the mode of dramatizing or enacting possibilities offers a way to understand how cultural conventions and social norms are embodied and enacted, and how the transformation of social relations is tied to "hegemonic social conditions rather than the individual acts that are spawned by those conditions" (Butler, 1988, 525). Hence, the need to become ever more aware about social norms both in society at large, and in dance education. It is evident that dance educators may both ignore and enforce these norms. Ignoring how social norms are at play in dance education situations, may, in our view, be as detrimental for performing difference as enforcing normative traditions within dance education.

Butler refers to the anthropologist Turner (1974) for whom social action requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a reenactment and re-experiencing of a set of socially established meanings. Turner's emphasis on repetition is also intriguing in that it connects performance studies with philosophy of difference, which we will discuss shortly. Also, there is a connection with Goffman's work, as the notion of social performance resurfaces here with the recognition that these repeated "actions" are performed for a public. Interestingly, Butler sees a pedagogical, or socializing, process here, claiming "the performance renders social laws explicit" (1988, 526). This kind of performance as noted by Butler, could be viewed in a dance education context when a teacher might impose one kind of social norm within the dance class. It could also be seen when peers bring in social norms from their

everyday life contexts to the dance learning environment. This then results in a multiplicity of pressures in the educational sphere, making it impossible for young people to perform difference. Referring, again, to theatrical performance, where the script may be enacted and interpreted in various ways, performing gender happens in a culturally restricted corporeal space where interpretations are enacted within “the confines of already existing directives” (1988, 526). Butler’s argument unfolds towards a claim that gender is an ‘act’ which constructs the social fiction that serves social control. Thus, gender is made to comply with a model of truth and falsity, which contradicts its own performative fluidity. We see these confines problematic for the allowing for flexible identities, for supporting the development of diverse communities, and for celebrating difference. For Butler, and for the development of our argument on the need to explore fluid identities through embodied, performative practices it is important to see the difference between expressions—especially in the sense of expressing oneself— and performatives. Thus, we close this section by examining performativity.

As a noun, a *performative* denotes to (speech) act(ion)s; e.g. to utterances that are events or actions in themselves, instead of descriptions of events or actions. The British philosopher Austin (1975), who coined the term in his seminal text *How to do things with words*, focused on performatives in the context of ordinary life rather than theatrical contexts, saying that performatives in the latter are in strange way empty or meaningless, because they do not have the consequences as do performatives in real life. In other words, performatives in everyday situations have actual consequences, or impact on others. Austin’s view differs from the perhaps most common, adjectival meaning of the term, where performative is understood as referring to the performance aspect of any object or practice under consideration (see for example: Schechner, 2006). Nowadays, we see the term being used in these varied meanings in the contexts of everyday lives, in the context of diverse cultural practices and in the context of (performing) arts. For us it is important to understand the potential of performatives as embodied statements that have impact but do not need to be expressive of inner self, fixed identity, or cultural norm. In this sense, performatives might become a tool for bending and playing, experimenting and creating, breaking boundaries, and finding new forms of embodied actions. This in turn may allow us to re-imagine how processes related to constructing identities and creative expressions take place within dialogical, or third spaces. Through this change of perspective we might be able to consider how identities of young people might be seen as constantly evolving through non-binary modes, and how dance education might provide safe, dialogical –third– spaces for nurturing these processes. We now turn towards a brief discussion on positive philosophy of difference that might deepen our understanding of the nature and significance of fluid boundaries and explorations across boundaries and differences. Then, we complement these views with Homi K. Bhabha’s ideas on identity, third space, and cultural difference that lead us towards formulating a synthesis on the notion of performing difference.

3. Philosophy of difference: towards multiplicities, possibilities, experimentation, and creativity

The notion of difference is a complex philosophical concept. There are several philosophies of difference, but they all reject foundationalism and “totalitarianism” that marginalize or eliminate that which is different. The following, often quoted paragraph by the French philosopher Deleuze (1994) inspires our work greatly:

[E]very time we find ourselves confronted or bound by a limitation or an opposition, we should ask what such a situation presupposes. It presupposes a swarm of differences, a pluralism of free, wild or untamed differences; a properly differential and original space and time; all of which persist alongside the simplifications of limitation and opposition (50).

While we are inspired by Deleuze’s work, we do not attempt to study his complex ontology as philosophers, because we are not. Rather, we seek to interpret and apply his thinking with the help of other scholars who have studied his work in depth. According to dance scholar Löytönen (2017) Deleuze’s positive philosophy of difference strives toward multiplicities and possibilities in life and the world rather than toward negative categorical difference that makes a separation or distinction between things. May (1997) argues that Deleuzian philosophy of difference signifies a conceptual move from categorical difference to differentiation or becoming and seeing “...difference as a constitutive element in some part of our experience” (2). The emphasis in philosophy of difference is then on “how things become different, how they evolve and continue to evolve beyond the boundaries of the sets they have been distributed into” (Williams, 2013, 65). The philosophy of difference departs from the idea of the identity of the self because privilege assigned to identity ignores real difference. Deleuze, much in line with Bhabha’s view which we will turn to next, sees that “modern thought is born of the failure of representation, of the loss of identities, and of the discovery of all the forces that act under the representation of the identical” (1994, xviii). For him, the primacy of identity defines the world of representation. Instead, affirmation of difference comes prior to identity and negation (Williams, 2013, 81–82). Williams (2013) explains that,

...each time we fall back on to a thought in terms of oppositions and contradictions, we cannot experience real difference. ... An experience does not lie in the opposition of subject and object, or experiencer and experienced, but in a coming together that requires neither subjective nor objective identity (83).

Williams also elucidates that human beings are different because their thoughts and sensations and the way they change are expressions of different relations to wider environments. In this kind of thinking, fixed representations of things lose their significance. Such representations are formed through habitual repetitions and recorded in memory. They are deceiving because they lead us to see the individual as a member of a class or species, and to assign a fixed identity to it (2013, 12). Instead, Deleuzian ontology defines being as something that resists categorization, with the perspective that categories are always illusory from the point of view of being. Difference, in Deleuzian terms, turns all representations into illusions, and “identity is only a cloak thrown over deeper pure differences” (Williams, 2013, 61). Moreover,

... difference sets things in movement and can only be approached by resisting thought in terms of the proper and in terms of

categories ... *It is not what you are or what this is, it is what you are becoming and why this becoming is significant for others and other things* (Williams, 2013, 65).

To resist the fixing of identities and in order to live intensely it is important to experiment with our bodies and minds and to forget our attachment to a particular body and mind, with the suggestion that "...we must experiment with our thoughts and bodies to turn to novel intensities, to difference in itself" (Williams, 2013, 10).

This leads us to look at embodied artistic practice, and specifically dance. Indeed, Deleuze sees art as a possibility for affirming difference and avoiding dependency on representation; he speaks about an aesthetics of difference that escapes representation. Connecting these ideas to dance education, and to creativity and learning, we can lean on philosophy of difference. As Williams (2013) notes,

To learn is to learn how to be sensitive to and respond creatively to signs and problems, as things that necessarily go beyond what is known or what can be done in a given situation. This sensitivity and creativity are linked ... learning is above all experimentation free of goals in knowledge or skills (146–147).

Deleuze's affirms that, "we learn nothing from those who say: 'Do as I do'. Our only teachers are those who tell us to 'do with me', and are able to emit signs to be developed in heterogeneity rather than propose gestures for us to reproduce" (1994, 23). In our view these thoughts open a field of possibilities for encountering others and otherness in dance education contexts. We now turn to Bhabha's ideas that add yet another layer into this discussion.

4. Reflections on identity, the third space, and cultural difference

Within conventional discussions of identity, there seems to be an inclination towards categorising and labelling, and in turn extending this in to how people are viewed and how people view themselves. While this categorisation and labelling may be a way of locating people within a cognitive landscape these labels and categories have given birth to the notion of 'otherness' and 'othering' that for many, including ourselves, limit human potential and reduce the complexities of social reality into 'us and them'. For several decades, postcolonialist scholars, among others, have tackled this phenomenon, and shifts have been made towards reconceptualization of what might constitute, form and be understood as identity. Within Bhabha's notion of the *Other* (1990, 1994) identity is viewed as something that evokes the Other, drawing on the idea that identity is found through difference. In Bhabha's words the Other is something that "emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse, when we *think* we speak most intimately and indigenously 'between ourselves'" (Bhabha, 1990, 4).

With a theoretical frame that desires a reconceptualization of the notion of identity as a phenomenon not resting upon categories grounded within similarities and/or differences, and rather, re-imagining identity as something that is less positional and more fluid, Bhabha's work (1990, 1994) helps us to both unpack and view the complexity within such an idea. In his view the articulation of identities, and within that difference, is something that is produced in what he describes as "in-between" spaces of definitions and identity (1994, 2), a realm Bhabha (1990) also articulates as the *third space*. It is within such in-between spaces that there is the opportunity for "strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (Bhabha, 1994, 2). The third space, an idea from post-colonial sociolinguistic theory of identity and community, offers a mutual recognition of difference, emphasizing that through dialogical (third) spaces, difference may become transformed and mutated into something new (Bhabha, 1994).

Bhabha's notion of the third space offers a useful frame to understand (cultural) difference as a possibility for something new to emerge, and to reconsider the notion of identity as a shifting and transforming process that remains open, in an ever-fluid state. Moreover, Bhabha (1994) articulates, "the move away from the singularities of 'class' and 'gender' as primary conceptual and organizational categories, has resulted in an awareness of the subject positions ... that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world" (2). Bhabha extends on this, explaining that there is a "need to think beyond narratives of the originary and initial subjectivities and focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences" (Bhabha, 1994, 2).

Bhabha, like Goffman and Butler, employs a theatrical metaphor in exploring his ideas, and explains how racial and cultural stereotypes prevail even in children's fictions, as "white heroes and black demons". Such metaphors emphasize observable characteristics, visible differences, and binaries. For Bhabha, "the drama of underlying these dramatic 'everyday' colonial scenes is not difficult to discern. In each of them the subject turns around the pivot of the 'stereotype' to return to the point of total identification" (1994, 109). It is these fixed stereotypes, cultural, ethnic, gendered, or any other kind that we want to overcome in and through dance.

These thoughts within Bhabha's work resonate with us and led us to raise and explore a multiplicity of questions within different themes, such as: How might we describe difference in a way that avoids essentialism and stereotypes? How could dance education be a site for shared, creative processes fostered through embodied, performative practice? How might we, through dance education encounters, create a space for young people to explore and develop an agenda that promotes tolerance and acceptance moving toward celebration of difference as the space we are experiencing?

We realise that the questions asked here are numerous and complex. We also understand that while such large-scale questioning may seem some way from the dance studio, these questions take on a poignant immediacy with the continuing prejudice and discrimination; on-going ethnic, religious, and sectarian violence – even genocidal activities and war; and increasing polarization over issues of race, religion, sexual orientation and ethnicity that is witnessed within our contemporary world. We will consider these questions further in the following section by looking more concretely at examples that illuminate 1) how might we, as dance

educators and scholars, enable young people to explore flexible *identities* through the performative, embodied acts, through dance? And 2) how might this experience foster space leading toward greater understanding of *cultural difference* as source of learning and living together?

With these ideas, we finally turn towards a more detailed discussion on the notion of performing difference. Doing so, we are moving away from the modernist, romantic ideas of self-expressivity, creativity, individuality and identity that have framed arts education, including dance education, for some time.

5. Performing difference: seeing and be(com)ing seen

In our view, embodied, performative acts that become shared with others in a social situation form the core of pedagogical practice that embraces differentiation and supports the development of diverse communities. The subjective experience of performing, that is, *being seen*, coupled with witnessing others performing, that is, *seeing*, creates a possibility for shared space where something new may emerge; where (cultural) difference may become articulated, sensed, and welcomed. However, neither repetition of existing cultural or gendered forms nor individual self-expression that bears no connection to others in the shared social situation, seems to be sufficient for creating such a shared space – that we like to see as a space for potentiality, or a third space. This is why the conditions where these embodied acts are being performed need to be supportive of constant variation and exploration, and encourage bending and breaking of norms and habits. A safe environment may foster a process where embodied, performative acts alternate with acts of receiving and responding to others' performative acts. Such process is akin to a collaborative approach towards creating dances that incorporates embodied action with negotiation, decision-making, opinion-stating, and demonstrating own ideas not only in words, but also with the entire body (Anttila, 2015; Svendler Nielsen, 2006; Anttila & Svendler Nielsen, 2019).

Each of us have, in and through our dance education practice, explored the question of what kind of dance experiences may foster confidence and courage so that young people would be willing to be seen, to become visible as embodied subjects, to perform difference? For us, any dance education setting is a stage of life where a multitude of performative events and actions take place outside a traditional, formal performance context. This means that everyday actions, in regular studio or classroom situations, where peers are the audience, are crucial in framing and creating the conditions, that is, the dialogical, or third space, for performing difference.

6. Towards practice: pedagogical implications

We now briefly discuss some practical suggestions, based on our own or our colleagues' experiences. These practical examples are presented with the intention of reining in what might otherwise be viewed as an abstract discussion. The examples we reflect in the following pages are drawn from our own teaching moments, or parts of research projects that engage with pedagogy. All are situated in contexts of teaching and learning, and have been selected for discussion here as we felt they illuminated discussion of difference in a tangible way. We start with discussing gendered expressions and practices within dance education as a way to offer a specific insight to one aspect of *identity* in inclusive and diverse practices in dance education, first focusing on children in Finland and then on women in Jordan. Needless to say, gender stereotypes in education, as in all areas of life, generate highly complex situations and are difficult to tackle pedagogically. Although dance education literature on this topic is abundant (see for example: Buck & Turpeinen, 2016; Lehikoinen, 2006; Risner, 2009), our purpose is not to present a literature review on issues related to gender, cultural, ethnic or any other type of diversity in the context of dance education. A study on how these areas intersect and create quite arduous conditions for individuals and communities, is a broad topic which could be discussed in another paper. Here, we focus on affirmative, embodied, and collaborative practices that elucidate possibilities for performing difference in dance education. In doing so, we focus on dance education as a shared, social practice, and creative expressions emerging from reciprocal encounters within diverse communities.

In pre- or primary school contexts dance education often takes place in mixed-gender groups. In these contexts gender stereotypes have successfully been "tamed" for example through using multiartistic means for creating movement material. In two dance education projects situated in a Finnish primary school (grades 1–2 and 3–4), creative processes were initiated by listening to sounds of simple percussion instruments. Imagery created by auditory stimuli was further refined through story-telling and drawing. Then, a narrative and dramaturgical score for a dance performance was created through a collaborative process where each pupil created their own character to loosely fit the story. This process generated diverse cross-gendered expressions and several non-gendered characters, for example animal creatures. These characters interacted in the performance with gendered characters: fairies and witches for girls, hero characters for boys (see: Anttila, 2003; 2013). Based on these experiences, it is possible to see how gender stereotypes can be overcome through imagery, story-telling, and other practices that draw from multiple creative and artistic sources that incite and build on children's imagination. Key to embracing this kind of process may be the educator's ability to resist the urge to impose a cohesive structure and sophisticated aesthetics on children's creations, and see the value in absurd and strange expressions. Similar experiences have been reported elsewhere in dance education literature. For example, Bond (1994) writes about how "taming gender distinctions" was supported through using masks. Finnish dance educator and artist Jalkanen (2005, 2018) has tackled this phenomenon in a studio context where most pupils are often female, and adhering to feminist stereotypes is prevalent. Her doctoral research indicates that young females welcome the playing with gendered expressions using cross-gendered movement styles, costumes, and themes. Here, again, drawing from multiple art forms seems to support courage to explore non-conventional embodied expressivity.

Dance education practices that are situated within safe and inclusive spaces, may also allow for gender stereotypes grounded

within very specific cultural, social or religious contexts to be transcended (see: [Martin, 2013](#)) and difference to emerge. In a dance workshop in Amman, Jordan, a group of young women were encouraged and supported to dance publicly with the purpose of creativity, physical expression, and innovation of movement and ideas. This support came through facilitators working closely over extended periods of time with the young women and their families, and including wider community stakeholders (such as local educators and arts organizations) in dialogue about the dancing. This active inclusion of others within the dance education encounter potentially created greater understanding of the motivation and activities within the dancing, allowing the voices of diverse parties to be heard, and in turn creating greater acceptance of the notion of difference. This act of dancing within a supportive environment shifted the young women away from the stereotype of an invisible, vulnerable, veiled, silenced, and non-embodied Arab or Muslim woman. Similar encounters have been noted by Lebanese dance scholar [Khoury \(2014\)](#), who explains that dance practices within the cultural context of the Arab world can reveal “new perceptions of the body’s potential and awakening a strong feeling of empowerment” (97) within wider socio-cultural norms. The discussion of disrupting gender assumptions and expectations within the dance class connects with literature most notably from scholars such as [Stinson \(1998, 2005\)](#) and [Shapiro \(1998\)](#). In generating choreographic tasks and stimulation within an environment where the young women felt a sense of safety, themes explored often sat outside what might be considered ‘culturally’ acceptable for public discussion. For example, investigating and questioning themes of sexual identity; abuse; religion; and gender identities through their dance making. Such explorations revealed a desire to encounter fluidity in identity, and openness to disrupt and critique dominant images, stereotypes, and ideals.

Dance education practice which is sensitive to the intercultural dimension that exists when people from different *cultures* are together in classes can put an emphasis on practicing to ‘see’ with the whole body, that is seeing others through trying their ways of moving and thus experiencing what it is like to move and be like them ([van Manen, 2002](#)). Such practice makes children and young people more aware of both the differences in their groups, but also they become more aware of who they are themselves. Presumptions about others and how they are can be questioned and discussed through such practice and might therefore help fostering acceptance of diverse ways of being in a group. The students do not have to stay with the new ways of being that they have tried, but those ways of being might become part of their movement repertoire and will then widen their future possibilities for acting and being. It is often part of creative dance classes that children have to invent movements and try each other’s movements. In a dance project with a class of grade 1 students in a multi-cultural Copenhagen school special emphasis was put on the children inventing movements based on former experiences they had either through dance in their cultures or other movement experiences. They tried each other’s movement inventions, some of which were clearly cultural both in ethnic ways (e.g. belly dancing and other identifiable forms) and in sub-cultural ways (they did breakdance movements which they learned from their older brothers in the street) ([Svendler Nielsen, 2006](#)).

These are just a few examples that we want to share for making a connection between the theoretical discussion and embodied practice. Although we acknowledge that dance education practices are becoming more inclusive and diverse, there are conventions that are difficult to change. Our intention is to incite discussion on these issues for developing dance education that celebrates difference, rather than erases it.

7. Conclusion

Above, we have presented some examples and experiences on how cultural discourses and dialogical encounters may take place in dance studios, schools, and stages. Through these accounts we have explored the possibilities to foster shared, creative processes through embodied, performative practice within dance education. In concluding this research essay we once more affirm our view that dance is an example of a performing art that, when connected to students’ everyday lives and social realities, offers significant possibilities for transformation and social change. However, we also need to allow ourselves and our students to imagine and perform alternative realities, possibilities, utopias, making the impossible possible, and participate in creating spaces for performing difference. Moreover, we need to let ourselves be affected, and we need to dare to affect others in an ethical way. We propose that dance education that is framed this way may be able to create conditions for learning and living together within diverse and sustainable communities. Thus, we claim that dance has educational potential beyond learning dance.

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