Entanglements of dance/poetry: Creative dance in students’ poetry reading and writing

Sofia Jusslin and Heidi Höglund

Faculty of Education and Welfare Studies, Åbo Akademi University, Vaasa, Finland

ABSTRACT

This study explored the pedagogical implications of integrating creative dance into fifth-grade students’ poetry reading and writing within the context of an educational design research project. Two teaching designs were developed and implemented by a researcher, a dance teaching artist, and two primary school teachers during two research cycles (the academic year of 2018–2019). Thinking with new materialism, a diffractive analysis was used to identify performative agents that make a difference in students’ meaning-making processes. When dance was integrated, it became entangled with the poetry in students’ meaning-making processes. The boundaries between reading, writing, and dancing became fluid, enhancing the attention to the materiality, relationality, and embodiment of the students’ reading and writing processes. These results demonstrate that dance integration has the pedagogical potential to deepen and broaden the meaning-making in poetry reading and writing. This article therefore concludes by presenting some recommendations for how to integrate creative dance into first language and literature education.

Introduction

Previous research has suggested that integrating dance with poetry reading and writing has pedagogical potentials and positive contributions and can increase students’ appreciation of poetry (e.g. Boswell and Mentzer 1995; Delchamps 2018; Giguere 2006; McCormick 2011). Within the field of ‘creative dance,’ which is defined here as the interpretation and expression of ideas and emotions through the movement of an individual’s own body and abilities (Gilbert 2015), there is an ongoing discussion about the goals and content of creative dance education in the contemporary school context (Örbaek and Engelsrud 2019). However, the integration of dance in first language (L1) and literature education, and more specifically within poetry education, remains an understudied research area. Moreover, although poetry is not an extraneous phenomenon in dance education, the integration of creative dance in L1 and literature classrooms is uncommon, and it may be met with some resistance by teachers who are unfamiliar with the concept (Delchamps 2018). More research about how dance can be used, and its...
accompanying pedagogical implications, is thus needed to maximize and take advantage of dance’s pedagogical potential in L1 and literature education.

To address these research gaps, the present study explored students’ meaning-making processes when creative dance was integrated into fifth-grade L1 and literature classroom poetry lessons, with the goal of establishing some principles for using dance in future L1 and literature education. More specifically, this article reports research findings from an educational design research (EDR) project that seeks to develop and investigate teaching pedagogies with creative dance in L1 and literature education. The study was conducted in a Swedish-speaking school in Finland over two research cycles, during which we implemented two teaching designs that integrated creative dance into students’ poetry reading and writing. Our analytical question was: What performative agents make a difference in students’ meaning-making processes when creative dance is integrated into their poetry reading and writing?

**Thinking with new materialism**

Using a ‘thinking with theory’ approach (Jackson and Mazzei 2011), we thought with new materialism (Barad 2003, 2007) and adopted a holistic and performative approach to meaning-making. Moving beyond an anthropocentric ontology, ‘new materialism’ perceives knowledge as being created in the relations between human and non-human bodies (Barad 2003, 2007). We understand ‘meaning-making’ as affective, relational, embodied, cognitive, and constantly in movement (Østern et al. 2019) and it happens both within and between individuals. According to new materialism, meaning-making also happens in relations between matter and meaning; for example, body/mind, theory/practice, and researcher/researched are not separated. Thinking with Barad (2003, 2007), we acknowledge such non-existing boundaries as ‘intra-active becomings’ of the world, which are in turn entangled due to their irreducible relations of responsibility. Intra-action differs from interaction in that the latter requires the existence of independent entities while the former instead refers to entities that are not separate, distinct subjects and objects.

New materialism goes beyond being and focuses on doing and becoming. It argues that knowing comes from a direct engagement with the world, not from a distant vantage, and points to the profoundly relational and entangled nature of being and knowing—what Barad (2007) called ‘onto-ethico-epistemology.’ Thus, knowing/be(com)ing/doing cannot be separated from each other. This is also consistent with Barad’s (2003) notion of ‘performativity,’ which challenges the representational belief of the power of words to express and create knowledge. In addition, agency indicates making something happen, and all bodies, human and non-human, matter through the world’s intra-active performativity and can become performative agents (Barad 2007) that produce something of importance in the meaning-making process. We turned to performative agents to identify performative differences that make a difference and thereby, matter in students’ meaning-making processes with dance and poetry.

Thinking with new materialism (Barad 2007), we also adopted a relational, embodied, and material perspective on reading and writing processes that took into account both human and non-human aspects, since reading and writing are intra-active. This approach drew on Burnett and Merchant (2020), who proposed a ‘literacy-as-event’
conceptualization that includes three related ideas: first, it is created in the relations between people and matter; second, it always exceeds what people can conceive and perceive, thus encouraging continuous questioning of what is happening, even though nothing can ever be fully captured; and third, it implicitly encompasses multiple potentialities, including several opportunities for what might or might not materialize—literacy can travel in unexpected ways. Consequently, reading and writing processes can never be comprehensively planned in advance. Similarly, Zapata, Kuby, and Thiel (2018, 485) applied a knowing/be(com)ing/doing view to literacy, arguing that if we come to ‘know what literacies we are creating in the moment of be(com)ing with the materials—then we cannot always expect children to tell us what they are producing beforehand or even in the moment.’ They also stressed the embodiment and relationality of literacies and suggested that literacies are not bound by one body alone but instead lived through the entanglement of bodies—human and non-human alike. In sum, this points to the embodied, relational, and affective properties of doing literacies.

In the analysis, we also think with Höglund’s (2017) performative approach to literary interpretation. Höglund’s approach focused on meaning-making with poetry—acts of interpretations—as she analyzed students’ engagement with semiotic resources and how those resources served as a means for negotiating a text and its interpretations. Using a performative approach, Höglund (2017) also emphasized that literary interpretation is something one does and actively negotiates; it is not fixed or constant, nor is it a level to achieve or accomplish, and it thus resonates with the new materialist theory used in the present study. Based on empirical analyses (Höglund 2017), negotiating interpretations encompasses opportunities to respond to a literary text by combining, juxtaposing, and emphasizing different interpretations. However, we extend this approach in two ways. First, we go beyond literary reading and also include dancing and writing, both of which were available means of meaning-making in the present study. Making meaning through dancing and writing can also be understood as being negotiated in embodied, lived, transformative, individual, and collaborative processes. Second, in line with new materialism, we move beyond an anthropocentric ontology to account for human and non-human bodies in these meaning-making negotiations.

**Integrating dance into poetry reading and writing**

The present research assumed that reading and writing are embodied because all literacies are embodied (Enriquez et al. 2016; Zapata et al. 2018). Furthermore, Smagorinsky and Coppock (1995) found that dance can change understandings of literature, since literary interpretations can both shape and be shaped by creating dances. Moreover, in investigating the kinesthetic and performative interplay between writing and improvisational dancing in a university setting, Midgelow (2013) described a writing/dancing methodology that blurred their individual boundaries; she argued that combining writing and dance could enhance development and learning in both forms of expression. Similarly, Pollitt (2019) explored dancing as writing and maintained that the combination demanded an active straddling and dismantling of the borders of the forms of expression. Perry (2007) also argued that dance can enrich and challenge
creative writing processes, while Cooper (2011) noted that the processes of creating dances and writing share the need for inspiration, revision, reflection, and peer feedback.

Regarding poetry more specifically, Delchamps (2018) argued that teaching poetry through dance in higher education settings could enable students to approach poetry in kinesthetic, tactile, visual, and auditory ways, and that all poetry—but especially poetry that is strongly connected to issues of corporeality and movement—can be connected to dance. This connection, Delchamps argued, opens up different ways of thinking about a poem’s form, content, narration, and style. Although many teachers and students fear teaching poetry, misunderstand it, or view it as unnecessary (see e.g. Hawkins and Certo 2014; Kleppe and Sorby 2018), integrating dance into poetry lessons provides an opportunity for teachers to perceive poetry as more vital, mobile, and connected to lived human experiences, rather than as dull and merely intellectual (Delchamps 2018). Delchamps (48) also suggested that dance could permit teachers to ‘better understand the ways students’ bodies move while reading and understanding poetry.’ Moreover, Chen (2001) studied the implementation of teaching strategies to engage students’ critical thinking skills in learning creative dance and found that students’ previous knowledge of stories and poems influenced their dancing. Giguere (2006) examined children’s cognitive experiences when engaging in poetry writing and dance and found that the children used common thinking strategies when creating poetry and dance. Finally, McCormick (2011) studied transmediating processes in a language arts classroom and found that transmediating poetry to dance enabled students to analyze compositional use across disciplines.

The present study therefore sought to address the extant research gap on the use of dance in poetry lessons. An earlier pilot study found that dancing required students to engage in a close reading of the text and that students’ literary reading was (re)made into new bodily interpretations in an intra-action between dancer and literature (Jusslin 2019b). The pilot study suggested three ways of integrating dance into literature classrooms: 1) consideration of the relationships between dance and literature; 2) student collaborations in creating dances based on literary readings; and 3) affordances of the teaching environment. In an additional analysis, Jusslin and Østern (forthcoming) also noted that the project’s design team members inevitably affected the knowledge generation, since the team was not only responsible for but also part of the teaching pedagogies that they developed. Encouragingly, however, they also reported that the 13 weeks of the first research cycle was enough time for students to develop embodied knowledge about what creative dance integration meant in the context of L1 and literature education.

**Context, materials, and analysis**

**Research context**

The EDR project was conducted by a collaborative design team comprised of this paper’s first author, Sofia Jusslin; the dance teaching artist Lotta Kaarla; and two primary school teachers at Norra Korsholms skola, Ann-Charlotte Nyman and Tom Lithén. The project sought to change educational practices to improve learning and teaching in authentic and naturalistic settings (McKenney and Reeves 2019). Analytically, the project focused on designing and implementing teaching designs that integrated dance into poetry reading and poetry writing.
The teaching designs were designed and implemented in two fifth-grade classrooms during two research cycles in the academic year of 2018–2019. The study included a total of 41 students\(^2\) (10–12 years old) with no previous experience of integrating creative dance into their L1 classes when Cycle 1 started. Cycle 1 was conducted for 13 weeks and encompassed two separate teaching designs, but the present study only reports on the latter design that integrated dance and poetry. In the former, previously implemented design, dance was integrated with students’ writing of detective stories over a 9-week period. The students described in the present report thus had already received 9 weeks of teaching that integrated creative dance into the L1 class prior to the integration of dance with poetry lessons.

The Dance Literacy Model for Schools (Jusslin 2019a), which combines curricular and dance learning, was used as the pedagogical basis for the teaching designs. ‘Dance literacy’ refers to development and learning in, about, with, and through dance, and dance literacy education thus entails the development of students’ understanding and usage of dance languages, their expression through dance movements, and students’ interpretation of meaning-making in and through dance. The model includes three overlapping dimensions of dance literacy: dance as an art form and as a form of expression; dance combined with other literacies; and learning through dance in different curricular areas. The present study focused primarily on the integration of dance with poetry reading and writing lessons and learning poetry through dance.

Teaching designs

We designed two teaching designs, ‘DancePoetry1’ and ‘DancePoetry2,’ that used different approaches to integrate creative dance into students’ poetry reading and writing lessons. Both teaching designs used poems from the picture book Djur som ingen sett utom vi [Animals that no one has seen except for us], written by Ulf Stark and illustrated by Stark and Bondestam (2016). The book does not include one narrative story but is instead comprised of individual poems about imaginary animals with different personalities. The design team taught the lessons collaboratively in different configurations, with all team members present during most, but not all, of the lessons. The lessons were held in the students’ regular classrooms (see Figure 1); since two classes participated in the study, each lesson was therefore taught twice.

DancePoetry1

DancePoetry1 drew on a previous design developed in the pilot phase (Jusslin 2019b) and included six 45-minute lessons held over three weeks. Students read and danced the poem Quinellan (Stark and Bondestam 2016) in groups of four or five students, and then pairs of students wrote, danced, and filmed their own poems about friendship. The learning objectives were to (1) distinguish poetry from prose; (2) read, interpret, analyze, and express the emotions and messages in Quinellan using creative dance; and (3) write a poem about friendship and create an accompanying dance.

During Lesson 1, the teachers introduced a variety of poems to the students and surveyed their existing knowledge of poetry. The teachers highlighted some
characteristics of poetry (e.g. form and rhyme), compared poetry to prose, and explicitly emphasized that there are no wrong interpretations in poetry interpretation. The poems included combinations of written text, images, and music to emphasize that poetry can be expressed in a variety of forms.

In Lessons 2–3, Lotta first gave the students tools to create a dance about a poem. Lotta next introduced and read the poem Quinellan and asked the students to focus on interpreting and analyzing the poem’s story, message, and emotions. Students could use their voices, rhythm instruments (e.g. tambourines, maracas, triangles), and their bodies in their dances. After each group had finished creating a dance, the groups took turns performing. The audience was given guiding questions to answer while viewing the dances, such as what they liked in the dance and what relationships they saw between the dance and the poem. The dancers also shared insights into their thoughts when creating the dance. Each group performed its dance twice, to provide dancers and audience enough time to give and receive constructive feedback.

Lesson 4 began with the teachers reading aloud a poem written by Sofia; while the teachers read it, Sofia performed an accompanying dance. The students then analyzed the poetry dance and asked questions about it, and Sofia described her writing strategies and how she had composed the dance to it. Afterward, students were assigned to write poems about friendship. Although the students wrote individual poems, they worked in pairs to brainstorm ideas and key concepts and to discuss their writing.

In Lesson 5, Sofia started by providing the students with three poetry writing frameworks. Each framework built on three keywords to the theme of dancing and had an accompanying poem, written by Sofia. The students read the poems and discussed what
poetry can look like, how they can be structured, and how they compare to prose (e.g. letter case, stanzas). Working in the same pairs as in Lesson 4, the students then wrote their own poems, with assistance from Sofia and the teachers as needed.

In Lesson 6, the teachers showed students how to film their poetry dances using iPads. Students then composed poetry dances and decided who would read the poem and who would dance it. The dance performances were filmed and uploaded to the school cloud service.

Following the conclusion of these lessons, the design team evaluated their strengths and weaknesses and designed DancePoetry2. Four main changes were made: (1) providing students with more time, since the limited timeframe in DancePoetry1 constrained student’s meaning-making processes; (2) using animations of the poems that included music and the author reading the poems out loud (Svenska Yle 2017), to broaden students’ understandings of literary reading; (3) aligning the themes of the poetry writing assignments with those of the Stark and Bondestam (2016) poems, because the design team felt that the DancePoetry1 writing assignment was too disconnected from the poetry reading; and (4) giving students more opportunities to discuss and provide feedback about their peers’ poetry dances, to emphasize the importance of reflecting on poetry reading, writing, and dancing.

DancePoetry2
DancePoetry2 included four 90-minute lessons held over two weeks. Each group first read and danced a poem and then wrote and danced a continuation to that poem. The five learning objectives were to (1) explore, improvise, and create movement material using inspiration from the poem; (2) interpret and analyze the poem’s emotions and messages and express and create them in creative dance; (3) create a written and danced continuation of the poem; (4) watch their peers’ poetry dances and give constructive feedback, with support from guiding questions; and (5) reflect on the purpose of dance in their reading and writing processes.

In Lesson 1, students were first asked to improvise dance movements that portrayed different animals, set to ambient music. Students then listened to four poems (Bipolaren, Celansetten, Klumpantropus, and Ågdjuret; Stark and Bondestam 2016) and watched video animations of them (Svenska Yle 2017). Together with Lotta and the teachers, the students then briefly discussed each poem’s emotions and messages. Afterwards, each group of students chose a poem to work with. They interpreted its emotions and messages and created a poetry dance that did not use either speech or music. Finally, they performed their dance and discussed why they chose their poem and what emotions and messages were conveyed by the poem and its dance.

In Lesson 2, students first improvised the movements of the animals in their chosen poem. Lotta guided the students by reading the poems and asking them to imagine various aspects of the poem (e.g. the environment). Afterwards, the students continued working in their groups, with the instruction to continue using the dance they had created in the previous lesson but to add sounds from the poetry animations. At the end of the lesson, each group performed its dances and the other students provided constructive feedback.

In Lesson 3, students first improvised movements that bodily expressed the poem animals’ emotions. The students then closely examined their poem’s end rhymes and
their placements within the poem. Afterwards, the poetry writing assignment was introduced, and the students were told that they would be writing a continuation to the original poem, focusing on ‘what happens next’ and the messages, story, and emotions. Students wrote drafts and provided feedback to each other. After, each group read the original poem and their continuation poem out loud, while the other students analyzed and interpreted the emotional and narrative changes in their peer’s continuation poem.

In Lesson 4, the students began by improvising the movements of the animals in their continuation poems and then created dances for their continuation poems. To accompany their dance, each student could choose one of three different songs, preselected by Lotta, or they could create own music with rhythm instruments. Afterward, each group performed their poetry dances, including both the original poem and the continuation poem, and the audience interpreted the dance’s emotions, messages, and story and gave constructive feedback. The design concluded with the teachers and students discussing their experiences of combining dance and poetry.

**Materials**

We generated a variety of materials to analyze the afore presented teaching designs, including video recordings of all lessons and group interviews with 13 students who were in video focus. Each video recording focused on one student group per lesson as well as a whole-class camera that recorded all of the classroom teaching (three lessons did not have a whole-class camera because of technical issues with the camera). In addition, our research material included the design team’s bodily evaluations, experiences of, and presence in the lessons, since the design team was part of the knowledge generated in the classroom (Jusslin and Østern forthcoming). We therefore took into consideration what the design team experienced on the classroom floor, what they learned when interacting with the student groups, and what changes they made to the teaching designs. These research materials are non-hierarchical; no type of research material is foregrounded. We read the different materials through each other and together with theory.

**Diffractive analysis**

To answer the analytical question, we performed a diffractive analysis. Diffraction highlights entanglements between material-discursive practices and identifies differences in themselves without doing comparisons (Barad 2007). The differences are instead identified based on how an object of study intra-acts with performative agents. In its original sense, diffraction refers to an optical and physical phenomenon in which a wave encounters an obstacle and consequently spreads differently than it would otherwise have done. A diffractive analysis thus enables researchers to identify performative agents in research material by making ‘agential cuts’—i.e. freezing an entanglement in order to materialize different phenomena (Barad 2007). Diffractive analysis includes embodied engagements with the material that make the researcher productive in the phenomena (Lenz Taguchi 2012). In the present study, we acknowledge that we are responsible for the cuts that we made and that the perspectives of the first and second authors differed because the first author was active and present on the classroom floor while the second author was not; the
role of the second author included participating in the analysis and reporting of the study.

Reading our material through each other with new materialism, we analyzed the performative agents that were created in relations in students’ meaning-making processes. To this end, when making agential cuts we considered ‘negotiations’ (Höglund 2017) as part of our diffractive apparatuses of knowing (see Barad 2007). More specifically, we read with the concepts of negotiation, entanglement, and intra-action, each of which initiated diffractive waves that enabled us to identify performative agents that affected students’ meaning-making processes—for example, a performative agent that made something happen by advancing or delaying students or making them (re)negotiate their reading, writing, and dancing.3 We identified eight performative agents that made the most difference, which are presented in the next section alongside empirical examples. All excerpts were translated from Swedish to English by the first author.

Findings

How the poems made a difference

The poems—i.e. the written poems and their illustrations and animations—intra-acted with the students’ bodies in the students’ meaning-making processes; the students became the poetry animals in an embodied and exploratory manner. Without explicit instruction, the students read the poems and payed attention to the entanglements of text and image in the picture book. They noted that both forms of expression, and the combination thereof, were needed to negotiate and create their poetry dances. Integrating dance thus required them to read the text closely. In addition, during DancePoetry1, students expressed that it was more difficult to create dance from the published poems than from the poems they wrote themselves, which is evident in Excerpt 1.

Excerpt 1: Interview in the DancePoetry1 design

Ellen: I feel that it was difficult to create a dance to the poem. I don’t know why. And I also feel like that every time when we created others [written texts], for example different sentences, I feel that has been easier than the poems.

Sofia: Okay. Why do you think that is so?

Ellen: I don’t know, maybe it’s more like, you interpret the text, and otherwise, you know what the sentences mean.

Excerpt 1 illustrates how students had stronger personal and affective relationships with their own poems, thus requiring them to negotiate in a different way and affecting the intra-action between student and text.

Each time that students revisited the poem during DancePoetry2, they had to (re) negotiate their initial responses. For example, one pair of students, Ellen and Gabriel, first read Bipolaren out loud and then discussed their interpretations and how to create them bodily. Moving between text and dance, Ellen and Gabriel’s negotiations revolved around the poem, the dancing, and their combination; as a result, dance and poetry became entangled in their poetry dance (see Figure 1). In addition, since different groups
of students worked with different poems, students had the opportunity to bodily read and interpret other poems by viewing other students’ poetry dance performances, in which the materiality of the *intra-action* with the poems shifted from the book to the students’ bodies.

**How authorship made a difference**

Referring to both dance-making and writing, the sense of authorship had agency. Most students chose to dance their own friendship poems, making the *intra-actions* in their poetry dances more personal and emotional. This sense of authorship was deeply *entangled* with the theme of friendship and the intended recipients, which may have affected how students approached the dancing of their own poems (Excerpt 2).

Excerpt 2: Interview in the DancePoetry1 design

Gabriel: I am more satisfied with the poem than I am with the dance.

Sofia: Okay, why do you think that is so?

Gabriel: I don’t know really. This will sound weird, but it felt like the dance ruined the poem.

For Gabriel, writing and dancing thus counteracted each other; his dancing could not match his satisfaction with his poem. In a way, his poem resisted transformation into dance. However, this varied from student to student. For instance, for another student, Ellen, combining dancing with a written poem about friendship succeeded in expressing a sense of the *entangled* authorship in writing and dancing (see Excerpt 4).

Creating the continuing poetry dances made students (re)visit the original poem and *(re)negotiate* their initial literary readings. The poetry writing assignment thus became *entangled* with their readings, as relationships were created between reading, writing, and dancing. For instance, Ellen clearly became the choreographer of her group’s continuing poetry dance: she maintained the relationship between the original poem and its continuation while listening to movement suggestions from other group members and collaboratively *(re)negotiating* if and how to use their suggestions. Ellen’s authorship as a choreographer thus impacted the group’s authorship of the dance. The twin examples of Gabriel and Ellen illustrate how the sense of authorship in both writing and dancing affected students’ satisfaction and willingness to (re)make meaning in reading, writing, and dancing.

**How the design team made a difference**

The design team members became performative agents as they questioned, guided, supported, helped, and challenged students. Sometimes, the design team became the link that *entangled* students’ meaning-making in reading and dancing. For example, Excerpt 3 shows how the audience gave constructive feedback after seeing Olivia, Alexander, and Casper’s performance of their poetry dance to *Bipolaren*.
Excerpt 3: Student and teacher interaction during Lesson 2 in the DancePoetry2 design

Niclas: In the beginning, I don’t know, it can also be that it was the music. But it took really long, like we had to wait until that one [the author] said the word. So, they could maybe start a bit later. But not that much later.

Ann-Charlotte: Exactly, not much happened in the beginning.

Niclas: Exactly, because when Olivia was like this and waited there for that sentence, it took a while.

Ann-Charlotte: Yes.

Lotta: Could you perhaps walk a longer way maybe, Olivia?

Michael: Or walk slower?

Lotta: Or walk slower.

Ann-Charlotte: Because, Olivia, what is the emotion like in the beginning?

Olivia: Sad.

Ann-Charlotte: Yes, and how are you when you are sad, if you would show it [Olivia expresses sadness in her face]. Yes, can you do something more?

Lotta: In your body?

Jasper: Cry!

Ann-Charlotte: Good! [Ann-Charlotte expresses sadness in her face] Yes, you cry, maybe it clearly shows that you are sad.

Excerpt 3 illustrates how Ann-Charlotte helped Olivia to **entangle** her dancing with the poem while Lotta helped her express the reading in her dancing, thus illustrating the design team’s agency in deepening and making something happen in students’ meaning-making processes. Lotta also functioned as a choreographer in some poetry dances to help students bodily **intra-act** with the feedback they had received, further demonstrating her influence in students’ meaning-making processes.

Moreover, the design team also made a difference by bringing their own artistic meaning-making processes into the classroom. For example, Sofia performed a poetry dance to a poem she had written. **Entangling** her role as researcher/teacher with a role of writer/dancer in the performance gave students the opportunity to ask questions about her authorship while simultaneously demonstrating the **entangled** nature of the authorship. As such, the design team both supported and challenged students’ meaning-making processes while also broadening their own meaning-making with poetry and dance.

**How creative dance made a difference**

The exploration and creation of creative dance movements became **entangled** with students’ reading and writing processes. For instance, when writing her friendship poem, Ellen expressed that dancing helped her writing process (Excerpt 4).

Excerpt 4: Interview in the DancePoetry1 design

Sofia: What did you generally think of writing poems and adding dance? Was there something special that dance contributed to when you wrote your poems?

Ellen: It was maybe that, from time to time, I also thought in advance about how I would do the dance steps. So, maybe I also came up with how I wanted it in the dance through the
writing. Because I had already written a bit, and if I got stuck on something, then I could also think about what I wanted to dance. Then, I came up with what words I wanted.

Excerpt 4 illustrates how creative dance made a difference in Ellen’s writing and enhanced the embodiment of her writing process, as her writing and dancing became **entangled**. When she realized the possibility of moving between writing and dancing to advance her meaning-making process, there was no boundary between her writing/dancing; they **intra-acted**. Reading and dancing was also **entangled** in Ellen’s poetry reading, which is evident in Excerpt 5:

**Excerpt 5: Interview in the DancePoetry2 design**

Sofia: When you created the dance, did the movements and the emotions you wanted to express affect how you understood the poem?

Ellen: Yes, I think so.

Sofia: In what way?

Ellen: Well, when you show it yourself, you feel it more than if you just read the poem.

Excerpt 5 shows how the dancing enhanced the affectivity of the poetry reading for Ellen, which demonstrated the agency of the creative dance in her reading.

After improvising the animals’ movements in DancePoetry2, another student, Kim, asked Lotta if his group could recreate their dance. His **(re)negotiation** of the poetry dance may have been influenced by his group’s dance improvisations or by having witnessed other groups’ dances of the same poem. Kim stated ‘I have a great dance move’ as he continued working with his group to (re)create their poetry dance, indicating the performative agency of creative dance in his meaning-making process. Overall, creative dance enhanced the embodied aspects of students’ reading and writing processes. It also enabled and required them to create, develop, deepen, and challenge their read and written interpretations.

**How performing made a difference**

The act of performing poetry dances challenged students to **(re)negotiate**—or, more specifically, to develop, deepen, and broaden—their dancing, reading, and writing. Knowing that they would perform their work for other students provided a direction for their meaning-making processes. However, the performances were not considered as final products, but instead as processes through which students received feedback on their poetry dances, thus further developing and deepening the **entanglement** between students’ dancing, reading, and writing. The poetry dances therefore changed continuously throughout the process of performing. This process was particularly tangible for Ellen and Gabriel in DancePoetry2. Their poetry dance developed from Lesson 1 (Figure 1) to Lesson 2 (Figure 2) as it grew between the lessons and during the performance in Lesson 2, **intra-acting** with both human and non-human agents: when Gabriel and Ellen danced, Oliver dimmed the lights and Axel—hiding in the back—moved the flowerpots to indicate a shift from spring to fall.

The performances also opened up room for discussion (see Excerpt 3) and created **entanglements** between dancers and audience. The discussions were mostly initiated by the design team, but sometimes also by the students. For instance, when performing his continuing poetry dance, Daniel asked his audience what they
thought about the dance. Performing thus affected his role as a writer/dancer and it became important to him to receive feedback on specific aspects of his performance. Overall, performing their poetry dances became an important part of students’ processes of relating their poetry dances to their reading and writing processes.

**How time made a difference**

Time had agency because it both enabled and constrained students’ meaning-making processes. Prior to the DancePoetry1 design, the students had received nine weeks of a dance integration design in which they were given time to become bodily familiar with creative dance. Still, poetry was fairly new to them, and they needed more time to become familiar with poetry reading and writing. When writing their friendship poems, students were constrained by time. For instance, Miranda and Leo expressed that they felt pressured for time, which led to them to improvise their friendship poetry dances without deeply substantiating their creations, rather than annotating their movement patterns in relation to their written poems. The time constraints thus prevented their writing and dancing from becoming entangled.

However, in the DancePoetry2 design, the students were more familiar with poetry and knew what dance integration in poetry reading and writing encompassed. Over time, the students developed a greater knowledge of what was expected of them when working with dance and poetry: they knew how they could move back...
and forth between reading, writing, and dancing, and they started to **negotiate**, both how to dance their literary interpretations when reading poems, and also how to dance their continuation poems as they wrote it. Time thus enabled the students to develop creative dance experiences, allowing them to (re)make and **(re)negotiate** their poetry reading and writing.

**How rhythm made a difference**

Rhythm made a difference in students’ meaning-making processes as they **(re)negotiated**, (re)interpreted, and (re)created rhythms in their reading, writing, and dancing. For instance, students expressed that using rhythm instruments when dancing Quinellán helped them to bodily express and (re)create the emotions in the poem by enhancing the emotions in the poetry dances; rhythm and bodies thus **intra-acted**. Rhythm also made a difference when reading the friendship poems out loud during the creation of the poetry dances. For example, when Ellen danced, Richard read her poem but experienced difficulties finding the right reading pace; Ellen repeatedly asked him to read slower to synchronize the poem with her dancing.

The rhythms of end rhymes also had agency in the writing of continuation poems. Sometimes rhyme and story were **entangled** in the continuation poems, but sometimes the poem’s rhymes received more attention than its narrative. In addition, when using music to offset their continuation poems, the music’s rhythm affected students’ meaning-making. For instance, Ellen insisted on listening to the music before starting to create her continuing poetry dance because she wanted to hear ‘when to start dancing in the music,’ and her group could not advance in their meaning-making until they could listen to the song. Overall, rhythm—from instruments, reading out loud, rhymes, and recorded music—both contributed to and challenged students’ meaning-making processes.

**How props made a difference**

Although props were not included in the DancePoetry2 assignment instructions, all of the students **intra-acted** with props in their poetry dances. During Lesson 2, students in the first class used props to express parts of the poem that they either chose not to or could not express in their bodies. Instead, their literary interpretations **intra-acted** in human and non-human bodies, such as using flowerpots to symbolize changes in season (see Figure 2). When Lotta noticed the impact of the props in the first class, she encouraged students in the other class to consider using props as they developed their poetry dances. However, whereas the students’ initiative to use props in the first class indicated an **entanglement** of human and non-human bodies as a direct part of the students’ literary interpretations, in the second class, Lotta’s initiative encouraged students to **intra-act** with props as part of the poetry dances but it also indicated her teaching agenda of giving students something to do if they had extra time during the lesson. In both cases, however, using props in the poetry dances enabled students to extend their meaning-making outside of their own human bodies.
Discussion

Both designs illustrate how dance can be used in L1 and literature education. Reading our material with new materialism (Barad 2003, 2007), we identified eight performative agents that made a difference in students’ meaning-making processes. The differences made by the performative agents both contributed to and challenged the integration of creative dance with students’ poetry reading and writing. Our analysis indicated that the relations between poetry and creative dance materialized in the students’ bodies. Delchamps (2018) argued that dance enables students to approach poetry in kinesthetic, tactile, visual, and auditory ways. While we agree with this, we also suggest that the choice of working with these specific poems enabled students to approach the combination of poetry and dance in kinesthetic, tactile, visual, and auditory ways. Accordingly, as with all teaching of literature, the literary text selection matter when integrating dance in students’ reading processes. This is also consistent with previous findings that dance can deepen students’ literary reading and can both shape and be shaped by their literary interpretations (Jusslin 2019b; Smagorinsky and Coppock 1995). The integration of creative dance thus has the potential to promote students’ negotiations of their literary reading. This supports previous research on a performative approach to literary interpretations (Höglund 2017) as it illustrates how dance continuously both encouraged and requested the students to (re)visit the poem and (re)negotiate their interpretations, resulting in developing, deepening, and broadening their interpretations.

These findings suggest some similarities between the creative aspects of writing and dancing; as found in previous research (Cooper 2011; Giguere 2006). Creative dance made the students act differently in their writing processes. Knowing that they would dance what they wrote added a new, embodied layer to students’ writing, providing enrichment but also challenges and frustration to both the writing and dance creation processes. Knowing that they would perform also affected students’ creative processes. Their sense of authorship could thus be either strengthened or weakened by the integration of the writing and dancing processes.

Teacher support is of utmost importance in all aspects of teaching, but it was of particular importance here to help students deepen their understandings of the relationships among poetry reading, writing, and dancing. This agency was related to students’ need of support in working with dance and poetry. Since the design team was responsible for the teaching designs, they needed to identify when performative agents, such as time, rhythm and props, could make a difference in students’ meaning-making processes.

The students’ meaning-making processes included human and non-human bodies, and the boundaries between reading, writing, and dancing became fluid. The integration of dance thus enhanced the materiality, relationality, and embodiment in students’ reading and writing processes; dance and poetry became entangled in the students’ bodies, with no possibility of discerning, where their writing, reading, and dancing processes started and ended. In line with the new materialist approach to literacy (Burnett and Merchant 2020; Zapata et al. 2018), this pushes us to (re)think the necessity of approaching reading, writing, and dancing as three separate means of making meaning in this study; they cannot be separated due to their intra-activity. However, we also need to question whether this entanglement was due to DancePoetry2’s design. For instance, if
the poetry reading and writing were not related through the use of poetry animals (Stark and Bondestam 2016), would this intra-action occur? Ultimately, however, since reading and writing processes—and dancing—cannot be comprehensively planned in advance (Burnett and Merchant 2020), students’ dancing becomes productive and performative as it makes them (re)visit, (re)negotiate, and (re)think their reading and writing processes in the moment. Consequently, students’ negotiations when creating poetry dances are continuously taking shape in the relations in dance/poetry.

Conclusions

Overall, this study offers insights into the pedagogy of integrating creative dance and furthers discussion on the role of creative dance in a contemporary school context. Based on the present findings as well as insights from previous research, we recommend six principles to consider when integrating dance into L1 and literature education.

- **Literary text selection:** Consider if and how a literary text can benefit from literary interpretations being bodily (re)negotiated when integrating creative dance; some literary texts are more suitable for bodily work than others.
- **Creativity and authorship:** Consider how students’ creativity and authorship can be influenced by combining dancing and writing; it may not be advantageous to integrate dance into all writing assignments.
- **Timeframes:** Consider the use of time, both in relation to students’ previous experiences of creative dance and in relation to the content being taught, to ensure that students have enough time for their meaning-making processes. Creative dance integration can be difficult if students do not have previous experiences of creative dance.
- **Music and rhythm instruments:** Consider how the use of music and rhythm instruments can facilitate students’ dance-making when integrating dance in reading and writing; music and instruments can contribute to students’ creative and interpretative meaning-making processes.
- **Discussion and feedback:** Consider leaving enough room for discussion after performances and for giving feedback to students’ poetry dances; these have the potential to deepen and broaden students’ reading and writing processes.
- **Props:** Consider the use of props in students’ reading and writing, as they have the potential to extend students’ meaning-making processes beyond their human bodies.

The current study furthers the knowledge of how creative dance can be used to promote and develop students’ reading and writing processes, with implications for teachers, researchers, and policymakers. Through thinking with new materialism (Barad 2007), the diffractive analysis shows the entangled nature of dancing, reading, and writing poetry in the developed teaching designs. As such, the study expands the notion of what it means to make meaning in reading and writing in regard to materiality, relationality, and embodiment—especially when integrating creative dance. Yet, there remains a lack of empirical research and additional investigations
are needed. In particular, future research should examine how teachers approach dance integration in their teaching when they do not have the benefit of support and collaboration from a research team. As previous research that combines dance and poetry has focused mostly on younger students, another research topic worthy of exploration is poetry teaching through dance in higher grade levels where poetry education is more advanced. Overall, we conclude that dance has the potential to contribute pedagogically by deepening and broadening students’ meaning-making processes in poetry reading and writing lessons.

Notes

1. The design team and school provided informed consent to publish their real names. The team and the school principal read the article prior to publication and accepted its content. However, all students are referred to by pseudonyms.
2. Students’ guardians gave informed consent for their children’s participation in the research project.
3. When thinking with theory, researchers often use typographic elements, such as bold font, to highlight how theoretical concepts are put to work in the analysis.

Acknowledgments

This study was conducted in collaboration with the Regional Dance Centre of Ostrobothnia.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by the Svensk-Österbottniska Samfundet; The Swedish Cultural Foundation in Finland.

Notes on contributors

Sofia Jusslin M.Ed., is Doctoral Candidate in Educational Sciences at Åbo Akademi University, Finland. In her doctoral thesis, she collaborates with a dance teaching artist and two primary school teachers to develop teaching pedagogies that integrate creative dance in literacy education. Her research interests include dance integration and embodied learning in school and teacher education, embodied perspectives on reading and writing, posthuman approaches to literacy, and transdisciplinary approaches to dance focusing especially on combining dance and poetry. She is editorial board member of the Dance Articulated journal.

Heidi Höglund Ed.D., is Postdoctoral Researcher and Teacher Educator at Åbo Akademi University, Finland. Her research interests include literature in education, with a special interest in students’ responses, poetry, visual literature, children’s literature as well as intermediary perspectives and methodological approaches to the study of literature reading and literature education. She is currently particularly involved in research on arts-based approaches to poetry education as well as picture books and graphic novels in secondary education. She is board
member of Nordic Research Network on Literature Education and coordinator for the international Special Interest Group Research on Literature Education.

**ORCID**

Sofia Jusslin [http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1084-1378](http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1084-1378)

Heidi Höglund [http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9225-0175](http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9225-0175)

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