



Using Performance to Foster Inherent ‘Poetic Potential’ in Nordic Schools

Gry Worre Hallberg and Lotte Darsø

TO THE MOON AND BACK

I was once asked how I knew I had fallen in love. “Why, it was when every day became poetry,” I replied. How would it feel then, to live as if you were always in love? That’s what I experienced at the Sisters Academy. ...

Our poetic selves waited for us to find them through broken mirrors. ... Facilitated by our amazing teachers, each sense was at constant and heightened attention. One was an ephemeral veil of lace, another a dancing flame. One walked and danced like a queen, yet another offered to paint you with his gaze from the shadows. I found the poetry that had spoken to me my entire life sang in loud, unafraid, shining verses around and around my head, in

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circles of light and shadow. It was the song of my rebirth, of finding my twin through my poetic self.

Her name was the Moon. I realized it at the very first Evening Gathering, led in the most beautiful, nurturing whisper by none other than the Sister herself. All my life I've been a child of the sea. The moon has special significance in my religion—literally given to us by God to guide us. ...

The moon is shining impossibly bright right now. I am overwhelmed with love and gratitude for all my teachers, and all my fellow students, who provided an environment of generosity, honesty and compassion at every step. Who cried and laughed with me, and stroked my hair and spoke to me of bees and kissed my face and sang until our voices twisted around each other like moonflower vines. I will remember what happened at the Academy for as long as the Moon swims the seas of the galaxy. ...

Posted on 20 September 2015 by Student, Sisters Academy #3, The Boarding School, Inkö, Malmö, Sweden

Introduction

The above passage was written by a student who participated in a project and experiment called Sisters Academy. Gry Worre Hallberg, the co-author of this article, is the artistic director of the performance-group Sisters Hope and initiated Sisters Academy. She is also the originator of 'Sensuous society' and 'Sensuous learning' as conceptual frameworks for the explorations undertaken in Hallberg's practice. Sensuous society is the vision of a potential future world governed by aesthetic principles. The vision of a Sensuous society and the Sensuous society manifesto were written as a response to the banking collapse in 2008, which became known as 'the crisis'. The manifesto poses the question: what if the crisis is not just a slump in the output of industrial capitalism, but rather a sign that the economic paradigm is nearing its end as the dominant logic of society? What if we are moving towards a Sensuous society, where the general mode of being is defined by the aesthetic dimension, with the sensuous experience at its core? This would imply that the current economic rationality that dominates all spheres

of contemporary societies will be replaced. The idea is radical, but the basic principles of societies have changed several times previously, as shown in the following quote by the mythologist Joseph Campbell: *"You can tell what's informing a society by what the tallest building is. When you approach a medieval town, the cathedral is the tallest thing in the place. When you approach an eighteenth-century town, it is the political palace that's the tallest thing in the place. And when you approach a modern city, the tallest places are the office buildings, the centers of economic life"* (Campbell 1991, p. 126). Besides being available at sensuousociety.org, the Sensuous society manifesto was published in the anthology *Black Clouds* (Hallberg 2013) and *DRAMA* (Hallberg 2015). Based on Sensuous society as the conceptual framework informing Hallberg's practice, Sisters Academy aims to explore what schools might be in a Sensuous society. To this end, the Sisters Academy specifically explores new modes of 'Sensuous learning' in a school context. Sensuous learning as a concept is thereby derived from practice, not from theory, aimed at a performative exploration of the school within a Sensuous society (see TEDx talk 'Sensuous Learning', 2015) (Hallberg 2016).

Sisters Academy is currently performed in two different large-scale formats: 'The Takeover' and 'The Boarding School'. In the Takeover-format, Sisters Hope take over the leadership of an existing upper secondary school; in the Boarding School-format, Sisters Hope transform an art institution into a sensuous boarding school where guests enrol as students at the boarding school for at least 24 hours, including spending the night in the school dormitory. In this chapter, we will primarily focus on the Takeover-format. Here, Sisters Hope primarily work with the school's teachers to inspire sensuous innovation of professional practice. This approach is explored in further detail below under the heading *the context and content*.

Sisters Hope's performative method draws on immersive (Machon 2013), interactive and interventionist (Thompson and Sholette 2004) performance art strategies. The method is immersive in the sense that a whole school is being immersed into an otherworldly place that stimulates the senses and allows participants to think and feel in radically different ways than they are accustomed to from their everyday lives. The method is interactive in the sense that, once you are at the school,

you are perceived as a participant (student, teacher or guest) of Sisters Academy and the Sisters and the performance staff will engage with you in this sense. You leave your everyday persona behind to explore your potential poetic self while investigating how to evoke and activate your senses and emotions so as to deepen the learning experience. The method is interventionist in the sense that Sisters Hope will intervene in everyday life contexts using art to argue for the necessity that the aesthetic dimension be seen as an integral part of everyday life—not as something exclusive and autonomous. Thus, Sisters Academy is not just an arts-based method, but a complete aesthetic intervention, aiming to open and unfold the sensuous and poetic ‘an sich’ (Hallberg 2016).

Conceptual Framing

In the following, we will present selected frameworks that will be useful for describing and understanding sensuous and transformative learning. Overall, our position is informed by pragmatism as expressed by Dewey (1997), aesthetics as expressed by Strati (2000) and phenomenology as expressed by Merleau-Ponty (1962). The intention is to briefly present the frameworks here in order to draw on them in the subsequent analysis of the impact of Sisters Academy. The first introduces a binocular approach to education, based on the philosophy of Ernest Cassirer. The main point is that the eye of science reduces complexity through a process of abstraction whereas the eye of art intensifies and complexifies the object of examination through a process of visualization and concentration (Irgens 2014). Both are needed, but the balance is skewed towards science and we will argue that education and professional development need more focus on art and aesthetics. Art engages our feelings, or as Eisner has phrased it: ‘The arts are a way of enriching our awareness and expanding our humanity’ (Eisner 2008, p. 11). Aesthetics involve our senses as we not only make sense of the world by thinking, but also by seeing, hearing, tasting, touching and smelling (Strati 2000).

The second framework originates from Freud and concerns cognition, understood as a balance between primary and secondary thought processes. Of particular relevance in connection to sensuous knowing

are primary processes. These processes are characterized as spontaneous and simultaneous, without borders, a sense of temporality, precision, nuance and, most importantly, without language. They have a dreamlike quality and can contain ambiguity. Secondary thought processes, on the other hand, are logical and with stable ties to feelings, which is essential for the development of language. Furthermore, they involve a sense of time and can inhibit impulses from primary thinking. Evidently, these two types of process are complementary (Darsø 2001).

The connection between arts, aesthetics and primary thought processes is further elaborated by neuroscience. During the last few decades, brain research has demonstrated that people can't make rational decisions without accessing the emotional parts of the brain (Damasio 1999; Goleman 1996). Damasio explains how our consciousness comprises mental images (Damasio 1999, p. 9): "By *image* I mean a mental pattern in any of the sensory modalities, e.g., a sound image, a tactile image, the image of a state of well-being." An image also involves a somatosensory (bodily) modality such as 'touch, muscular, temperature, pain, visceral and vestibular' (Damasio 1999, p. 318). We will argue that sensuous learning begins at this level.

Learning is a cycle of different processes and methods that can release, trigger and support learning. A framework that is relevant for understanding the cycle of sensuous learning and knowing is the EPPP model developed by Heron & Reason, consisting of experiential, presentational, propositional and practical knowing (Heron and Reason 2008). Sensuous learning begins by experiencing something directly through immersion in the sensuous universe. Presentational knowing concerns the use of artful or aesthetic forms to express the experience (Darsø 2017), before articulating it as propositional knowing. Practical knowing, meanwhile, concerns practising and, through several repeated cycles, developing competence.

A framework on learning by Illeris distinguishes between cumulative, assimilative, accommodative and transformative learning (Illeris 2006). Cumulative learning is often the first step in learning something new and is based on repetition. Assimilative learning takes place when something new is added to prior knowledge in a gradual process. Accommodative learning happens when earlier knowledge is

restructured because of new (surprising) knowledge. Transformative learning completely changes prior knowledge and permeates a person's mindset or worldview profoundly, a process that can be painful and often touches on the existential. In relation to sensuous learning, the two latter forms identified by Illeris are the most relevant. It should, however, be noted that, when Sisters Academy aims at a transformative learning experience, it remains undefined what exactly that transformation should lead to. The exercise is to open and unfold a sensuous and poetic space. Within that space, learning experiences are individual and not aimed at a particular outcome, but in most cases have a profound transformative impact on the participants (cf. Hallberg's ongoing Ph.D. with the working title: *Sensuous Transformation: Democratizing the Aesthetic and Sustainable Futures*).

Learning is enhanced through reflection as a way to contemplate and make sense of experiences. Accordingly, we see reflection as an interspace, which is particularly important in relation to processes involving art and aesthetics (Berthoin Antal and Strauss 2016) because the arts provide access to qualities of life that language cannot adequately disclose (Eisner 2008, p. 7). How can images then pass the threshold of consciousness? One possibility is through artful inquiry, as it 'uses artistic methods to explore the not yet known, i.e., the emerging tacit knowing that can be called forward through these processes. In some instances the artistic method merges with the reflection process. It becomes the reflection process' (Darsø 2017, p. 155). Artful inquiry is thus a variety of presentational knowing (Heron and Reason 2008; Heron 1981) that combines artistic intervention with reflection. Reflection can therefore both be an interspace between experience and learning and an after-space, where experience is digested and contemplated.

Finally, we will draw attention to the importance of engaging reflexivity in the learning process. Cunliffe distinguishes between self-reflexivity and critical reflexivity (Cunliffe 2002). Both are needed in professional practice. Self-reflexivity concerns the internal process of critically examining one's own values and actions, as well as conducting 'reality checks' with colleagues and friends to get their perspectives. Critical reflexivity, meanwhile, concerns critically questioning

ideologies, structures and professional practice in order to reveal inconsistencies and irregularities. Antonacopoulou combines the concept of reflexive critique with *phronesis*, which involves wise choices that can bring about change. 'As a process, critique can cause movement away from existing assumptions and practices and provide the strength and conviction to search for new meaning, to search for new understanding, to search for new ways of living' (Antonacopoulou 2010, p. 89). Reflexive critique is relevant in relation to viable professional change.

Summing up, learning in traditional educational settings is often disconnected from experience and practice—and from feelings, senses and body. This is in stark contrast to sensuous learning, which involves and activates all the participants' faculties. Sensuous learning begins at the pre-verbal stage by stimulating sensing and feeling. It dwells on images, memories and dream-states before conceptualizing and making feeling conscious through form, metaphor and material. This is illuminated and unfolded through poetic-self exercises, as we shall see in the following.

The Context and Content

Between 2014 and 2020, Sisters Academy has been and will be manifested in different Nordic countries as Sisters Hope create otherworldly boarding schools and take over the leadership of a series of existing upper secondary schools. In the following, we will provide a thick description of the Takeover approach, drawing on data from three manifestations of Sisters Academy:

- Sisters Academy—The Takeover at HF & VUC, FYN, FLOW (Odense, Denmark. 2014)—A Danish upper secondary school with students ranging from 16 to 21 years old. Also see the school website <http://vucfyn.dk/flow-hfe>
- Sisters Academy—The Takeover at Nova Academy (Simrishamn, Sweden. 2016)—A Swedish upper secondary school with students ranging from 15 to 19 years old. Also see the school website <http://www.novaacademy.se/nova-in-english/>

- Sisters Academy—The Boarding School (Malmö, Sweden. 2015)—At the art institution Inkonst. Everyone above 18 could enrol as students for at least 24 hours. Also see the project website for the Swedish manifestation of Sisters Academy <http://www.sistersacademy malmö.se/>

In the Takeover, the dialogue with each upper secondary school is typically initiated a year or two prior to the manifestation, where Sisters Hope take over the school's leadership and prime the teachers with the following question: If the aesthetic dimension, rather than the economic, was governing society, and if tactile perception was valued as highly as the rational, how would you teach? The preparatory work with the teachers and regular staff at the school is initiated approximately half a year before this takeover and consists of an overall presentation, poetic-self workshops, individual meetings and reflective homework on how to innovate within each respective subject field; for instance, on how to teach maths sensuously. Sensuous teaching and sensuous learning are thereby co-created and unfolded during the manifestations of Sisters Academy rather than being a well-described formula to be stringently followed. The level and extent of the preparations depends very much on the available resources and timeframe at the particular school. Sisters Academy is a radical and unconventional project the implementation of which in itself presents a challenge to the schools. Justifying reserving several weeks for preparations prior to the manifestation can sometimes be difficult. However, a minimum of two full workshops days (including presentations and exercises) are required, with at least a few months for reflection between them. Furthermore, Sisters Hope organize a presentation of the project and a poetic-self experience for the students. The idea is, however, that the teachers and regular staff at the school assume the responsibility for introducing the project and preparing the students. This is primarily to encourage long-term impact by not bypassing the teachers and staff at the school in communications with students.

Sisters Hope typically move into the school a week prior to the manifestation. This is often during school holidays so as to allow the all-encompassing scenographic transformation of the school involving the

installation of an immersive set-, light- and sound-design. Basically, all lighting is filtered and a soundscape is installed in every space at the school, including toilets, corridors, the schoolyard, the gym, classrooms etc. Furthermore, every corner of the school is transformed using set-design. Most of the existing furniture at the school is removed, such as the traditional rows of tables and chairs in the classrooms, and new types of materials and objects are installed to evoke new learning experiences. Thus, the school is completely transformed before the students return after their holidays on a Monday morning, with the exception of certain things that are left open for the students' input; for instance, an unfinished room, or set-design in spaces which depend on student interaction to 'come alive'. The props are brought to the school in several large trucks, and a number of items are borrowed from teachers, local second-hand stores and people in the neighbourhood (sofas, beds, tables, carpets, armchairs, etc.). The transformation of the school is done by a team of set-, light- and sound-designers, working alongside Hallberg and a group of performers. The performers of Sisters Hope manifest as the Sisters Academy staff and unfold a 'Poetic Self'. Thus, the Sisters Academy staff embody, for instance, 'The Untamed', who works with learning through 'untaming' structures; 'The Gardener', who understands learning through and with natural elements; 'The Contiguous', who explores the potential of the borders, etc. See the description of the poetic-self exercise below for further details. The school's teachers are encouraged to take part in this transformation on a voluntary basis (Figs. 1 and 2).

The approach is performative. The idea is for the participants to immerse themselves in a sensuous universe and reflect on how new insights, new modes of being and being together and, not least, new modes of sensuous learning might emerge. A central concept is the performance methodology 'The Poetic Self', representing an essential part of the work of Sisters Hope and used during the manifestation of Sisters Academy. The poetic self is not a character, it is not a fiction; it is our inner inherent poetic potential that we might not unfold in our everyday lives but that we discover, give shape and donate our flesh to through performance. By doing so, we experience an expanding spectrum of possibilities, of new spaces in which we can be. We do



Fig. 1 Sisters Academy—The Takeover by Sisters Hope. Photo: I diana lindhardt



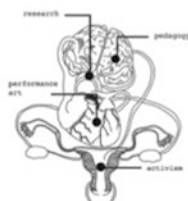
Fig. 2 Photo #2: Sisters Academy—The Boarding School by Sisters Hope. Photo: I diana lindhardt

not change: we liberate new potential; we expand. Thus, the poetic self is neither essentialist nor constructivist; it is a third approach, which is best understood as an *expansion of our space of manoeuvrability*. The poetic self already exists as a potential within us. It is an important point that we do not remove ourselves from ourselves through our poetic selves, but expand our selves. When we manifest, we live in our poetic self—sleep, eat, dream, love, fight, worry, teach, discuss, plan in our poetic self. This allows the release of as yet unexperienced or unfolded potential, the discovery of new ways to navigate in the world.

The Poetic-Self Experience

The first step towards finding the poetic self is what we have come to term the poetic-self experience. This is a sort of dream travel. Participants are asked to find themselves a comfortable position; for instance, to lie down on the floor, which would typically be carpeted or alternatively be covered with mats, pillows, blankets or other items to make participants as comfortable as possible. The Sisters Academy's main soundscape is played (Link to the Sound cloud <https://soundcloud.com/user-208979542>). This soundscape has a soothing, dreamy, yet mysterious and *unheimlich* ambience. Lights are dimmed and sometimes a subtle pink or red light is turned on, which adds to the distinct atmosphere that is being created. We speak into a microphone in order to be able to speak in a low, soft and subtle tone. The participants are asked to choose an element: water, fire, air or earth. This happens as they lie down with their eyes closed and listen to the guiding voice. The participants are asked to completely embody this element; to immerse themselves in this element. They now imagine that their body—from the tip of their toes to the top of their head—is being taken over by their chosen element. From this state of presence, a series of questions are posed to the participants—or more precisely to the poetic selves of the participants—to their inner inherent poetic potential (see Fig. 3).

These questions range from abstract questions, such as those regarding the poetic self's relationship to space and time, to quite concrete questions



The Poetic Self Exercise

The poetic self is not a fiction. Not a character. It is you. Something that lives within you that you might or might not express in your everyday life. Your inner inherent poetic potential which you explore and unfold. Through these questions we will initiate the unfolding of your discoveries.

Time: What relationship does your poetic self have to time? Consider time.

Pace: How do you move through time? Are you slow or fast? Looping, spiralling, horizontal, vertical, linear? How do you move through time? What is your pace?

Age: Does your poetic self have an age? Or are you ageless?

Space: What relationship does your poetic self have to space? Consider space.

Shape in space: What shape does your body have in space?

Pace in space: How do you move through space? Walking, flying, jumping or sailing? How does your body move through space?

Your sensory body: What is the gesture of your poetic self? What is the sound of your poetic self? What is the smell of your poetic self? What is the taste of your poetic self? Please, consider the sensory experience of your poetic body.

Relations/relationships: How does your poetic body relate the other? How do you engage with other people? How do you reach out towards the other?

Special relationships: Do you have a favourite relationship to anyone? Do they know? Who do you trust in the most? Why do you trust in this person or creature?

Temper: What is the typical mood of your poetic self? Are you open or shy? Do you establish contact with others easily or do you prefer to be alone? Do you become angry or sad sometimes? When? Why?

Fig. 3 The poetic self exercise

Mistakes: Does some mistake from your life haunt you? Why? What do you do to cope?

Golden moment: Try to recall a happy moment in your life? Recall the sensory experience of this moment - What did it taste like? What did it sound like? What did it look like? What did it smell like? What did it feel like?

Secrets: Do you have any secrets? Does anyone know about it? If now - why not? If so - Why? Please, consider the secret life of your poetic self?

Mystery: Please, consider the mystery of your poetic self?

Challenges: Do you have any illness, fears, vices? What do you do to cope with these? What would make you totally freak out? What would make you shut off?

Strengths: What is your poetic self particularly good at? What are you proud of? Why does this make you proud?

Function: What kind of function do you have in life? Are you satisfied with this? If not - why not? If so - Why?

Passion: What is the single state of being that will bring you to final happiness?

Activities: How does what you do, create value? What do you do in your spare time? What is your favorite duty? What is your favorite way of enjoying yourself?

Footprints: What footprint is after you? What traces do you want to leave behind?

Future: What dreams do you have for the Future?

There are no more questions for your poetic self.

Lastly, please consider:

- A **name** for your poetic self?
- A **shape** for your poetic self? What do you look like? What do you wear? How do you move through a room?
- A **totem** for your poetic self? Something that represents your inner poetic life?
- A **biography** for you poetic self? The life story of your inner inherent poetic potential?

on practical functions, mistakes, specific golden moments in life and particular relationships, to questions that may lead to an action-based practical manifestation of the poetic self. The first questions are abstract in order to illustrate that we have now entered a zone where everything is possible. The questions speak to the multiplicity of people's inner landscapes. The subsequent, more concrete questions might indicate that this is 'for real'; it is an exploration from and with your very real self. Finally, the last questions invite action, the implementation of this inner poetic potential in everyday life, such as the invitation to consider a totem as a reminder of the poetic self. When the questions have been posed and silence and soundscape given space, students are openly invited to write down the discoveries they have made during the poetic exercise. These might take the form of images, inspirations, sounds, colours, a name, a storyline—anything that 'appeared' during the poetic experience.

Student notes from Sisters Academy #3—The Boarding School, Sisters Academy Archive (each quote is from a different student, from the students' notebooks—not publically available online):

My sensuous self came to be called Artichoke. The name has been with me for a couple of years but it has quite a different tone to it in English, a side which was unfolded here at the academy. For many years it has had to stand back due to grimness and fear of being pretentious. But at least for now I feel reconnected, and I will bring Artichoke with me, not as a role or character but as myself, a state of mode enriching my being. Alive.

The rivers. My poetic self belongs to the rivers

My poetic self is alone. Solemn. Lonesome.

The name I chose for my self was simply the name 'Fire'. Not really creative, I know. But it is simply how I feel

I am a sad and lonely dancer. I move slowly through the space, cutting the air with my skin. I couldn't see anything behind my eyes, trying too hard blocked my imagination. When I opened my eyes I could finally see the sad dancer. My poetic self.

My poetic self is shy. Shy of its own strength

I really need this poetic-self-thinking

Process of Learning

The purpose of providing time for writing and reflecting on the exercise is to allow an opportunity for the intangible to become tangible, for the tacit knowing and learning to emerge (Polanyi 1983). However, it is only an invitation: some take it, others do not; some draw; some keep their eyes closed as they stretch and move their body, or just embrace the tranquillity and hold on to the poetic realm that has been opened within them. After digestion, reflection and writing, participants are invited to share their reflections with the person next to them, quietly and slowly, as a means to protect the poetry and the otherworldliness of the space. Next, larger groups of four and finally the entire collective in the room are invited to share. This process of reflection continues until the next workshop. Participants are told to keep the notebook between the workshops and to consider in more depth the exercise's final questions: a name, a totem and a biography for their poetic self. They are asked to find a suitable 'carrier' and begin to collect items, objects and clothing for their poetic self and to bring these along next time. The names given to the poetic selves are rarely 'real' names, but rather symbolic expressions of the inner poetic landscapes encountered by the person who embodies the poetic self; for instance, The Air, The Flow, The Untamed, The Well, The Island, The Mechanic, The Gardener, The Contiguous etc. (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4 Sisters Academy—Staff Portraits by Sisters Hope. Photo: I diana lindhardt

Creating Tableaux

Once people have the initial idea or image of their poetic self the next step is to learn how to expand the poetic self into space. This is done by creating a tableau for the poetic self, a space that mirrors each person's inner poetic life, visualized, made tangible and present to oneself and others. The exercises to create a tableau for the poetic self are mostly initiated collectively and are physical and relational. The reason we say 'mostly' is that the workshops and exercises are not completely fixed. How exactly they are facilitated depends a lot on the people in the room, the atmosphere that day, the available time and other circumstances. It is an important element to have these open ends in order to resonate as strongly as possible with what is going on in the room and thereby maximize the effect of the experience.

Whereas the poetic-self process is initiated through an individual inner journey, the tableau-creation exercise starts by relating to the other people in the room. The poetic selves of the people in the room are introduced by the facilitator's guiding voice. This is a fluid, organic process where the facilitator senses how to best present the different poetic selves; for example: 'Everybody freezes but The Island'. The Island keeps moving, and the rest of the people in the room will focus their attention on The Island and thus get to know her in an unconventional way; that is, not through a formal presentation. The next guideline might be 'Please, let your eyes gaze upon The Island, follow her movement, be curious—Who is she? Where does she come from? What does she want? Why is she here?' Then the participants begin to embody The Island, to know her. This continues until each participant's poetic self has been introduced. Each introduction is unique and individual, dependent on that particular participant's presence and mode of being in the room. Since the intention is to create a safe space for these new poetic selves, the facilitator senses how to ideally present each participant in the room. Another might be asked to answer questions whispered in her ear, yet another to present her poetic self verbally or through sound. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that the facilitator has a quite deep and precise, almost intuitive, understanding of each participant in

the room. The introduction, which might take hours, concludes with everyone silently finding a space in the room where they want to create a tableau for their poetic self. They bring their carrier with objects, items and clothing for their poetic self to this space and begin to unpack and dress and, thus, slowly externalize their inner poetic landscape. Eventually, these spaces are turned into entire rooms and rituals, inhabited by a certain poetic self during the manifestation. The process from the first steps of externalizing the poetic self in the collective space of the workshop to manifesting it performatively is a process of expanding, refining and continuously deepening people's understanding of their poetic self and its capabilities.

Interactivity Design

While the poetic-self workshop opens an inner landscape of poetry and the construction of the tableaux externalizes this inner landscape, the interactivity design is about relationships and how to relate to others from this space. The interactivity design creates a framework for encounters between two or more people. When someone enters into your tableau, how do you receive them? What happens in your tableau? What do you want them to learn through this interaction? How do you open and unfold an interaction? And how do you close the encounter down? How do you secure the integration and anchoring of the experience and learning situation? Do you give your visitor homework? The tableau and the interactivity design open the learning situation in the encounter between the Sister, staff, students and teachers: Ultimately it becomes 'the class' or 'the ritual' of the poetic self.

Art-Based Research and Data Production

Art-based research methods focus on how we can develop new methods of artistic experimentation, processes of inquiry and ways of knowing (Leavy 2015; McNiff 2008). Sisters Hope develop new art-based research methods to collect data on each manifested academy.

These methods make it possible to transport data out of the sensuous experiment while the participants are in the sensuous and poetic mode. Several types of data are donated and collected this way, including questionnaires, notebooks, letters, drawings, objects, etc. Besides the analogue archive, the data collection also contains a series of blog posts where students, teachers, performers and visiting researchers and artists express their thoughts and experiences at Sisters Academy before, during and after a manifestation. The content of the archive gives us special insight into the sensuous mode of being as the data is produced while the sensuous experiment and experience is ongoing rather than afterwards. The archive is open source; everyone can access it and Hallberg is currently writing her practice-based Ph.D. on sensuous learning based on this data.

The Impact of Poetic Potential

In most cases, the poetic-self process affects people on a quite profound level and thus creates a platform and a framework that allows for a transformative learning experience. The design is highly participatory, as everyone is invited to perform the role of their poetic self. The Sister is her poetic self as are the performance staff (up to 15 performers in the Takeover-format and up to 40 performers in the Boarding School-format), the teachers and the students. In the following, we will present empirical data from Sisters Academy #01 at HF & VUF, FYN, Flow, Odense, Denmark in order to examine the impact this project had on the teachers and students, respectively. All the quotes derive from Sisters Academy #01, unless otherwise indicated.

The Teachers

As mentioned earlier, working with the teachers as the primary agents of influence has been the overall focus of Sisters Academy's Takeover-format in order to maximize long-term impact. While students move through the educational system, teachers usually remain (longer).

When we enter an upper secondary school as external artists, the students are often quite attracted to the alternative we present. This can have the effect that everyday learning experiences seem drab and dull. It is important for us to signal to the students that Sisters Academy is a co-created project between Sisters Hope and the staff at the school. We create and own this together and they therefore also 'own' the poetry, so to speak, after our departure; they are not dependent on external artists for their learning experiences and the enchantment of their school. Part of the preparation phase is to help the teachers understand and take in this sensuous universe so that they can discover and explore the sensuous aspects of their regular curriculum from their own poetic self and be inspired to innovate or expand their professional practice.

During the two-week duration of Sisters Academy, the teachers are invited to work with their subject on three levels:

1. Thematically: Each teacher can select a theme from their curriculum to work with that they feel resonates with the overall intention of exploring sensuous learning.
2. Methodically: Each teacher can choose how to develop a method or process for their teaching that they feel resonates with the overall intention of exploring sensuous learning.
3. The teacher role: Each teacher can develop his or her poetic self to embody during the manifestation in order to deepen their understanding and exploration of sensuous learning.

In some cases, the project has resulted in new collaborations between the teachers. For instance, three maths teachers chose to collaborate during Sisters Academy #01:

The Sisters of Math are planning a quest of several tasks and challenges within the theme of growth. That particular theme is a focus of criticism when used in terms of economic growth as a paradigm in society. We want to expand the theme and explore it in terms of other areas. The students will measure the growth of grass, the decreasing oscillation of a pendulum and the chance of getting sixes when throwing dice. They will solve problems, which will provide them with clues to open the chest of tools for their experiments. This takes them to a new level of challenges.

For each task or challenge they pass they will receive a token or bead to wear in their Bracelet of Experience. As the bracelet is filled with beads, their minds and souls will be filled with experiences and thus will have visibly grown... Posted on January 15, 2014 by teacher.

During the same Takeover, one of the math teachers wrote:

...Every moment I am stimulated in a new way and my head is spinning with ideas. The colleagues are so inspiring to follow and the aspect of cooperation is the best part. What a gift it is to be working with my math sisters!... Posted on February 26, 2014 by teacher.

The students also noticed the difference in the teachers:

...Another essential part of the "Universe" was the teachers. I knew every one of them, from before Sisters Academy, but they were totally different in the established "Universe". I saw my teachers blossom – in areas never travelled or yet discovered by them, in their huge land of teaching. My respect for them and their job grew. I've always had respect for teaching, but to see them totally "unarmed", not knowing whether what they were doing worked or not, made a huge impression on me. I was proud, and I felt so comfortable being around them. Not only as teachers but also as individual personalities. Posted on March 20, 2014 by student.

What did the teachers learn through their experiences of Sisters Academy? Apart from each participating teacher's own personal learning, some insights were common. Many teachers commented on the significance that the different physical learning spaces had for the quality of learning. For instance, they discovered that some students were able to concentrate better if there was a soundscape in the background. Several teachers had also realized that they could motivate students to learn through sensuous and aesthetic approaches. The students showed much more effort towards learning and were more engaged.

... All my students seem to show more effort than usual. My heart is dancing. All my senses are stimulated all the time and combined with my tight schedule, hyped enthusiasm and all the props I carry with me, I

lost my rucksack, my keys, my grounding and was dizzy going home....
February 26, 2014 by teacher.

Other teachers pointed out how creativity, play and activating the body could help people reflect more deeply on subjects and themes. The whole idea of experimenting with different forms of learning was an important insight, and a new openness and interest towards laboratories of learning emerged.

...To me, it has been liberating to call it an experiment. It has led to an open mindedness among the teachers to the possibility that what we plan to do may not necessarily work out, and any odd way of doing it can be as good as mine.... Posted on February 26, 2014 by teacher.

One theme that became pivotal in the teachers' reflections was their role(s) as teachers. Working with their poetic selves had expanded their perceptions of how teachers could teach and how it was gratifying but also scary to immerse themselves in their new roles.

... But from my present position – which is ungrounded and slightly disoriented – it also feels a little scary.. Posted on February 26, 2014 by teacher.

The Students

What was the impact for the students in terms of learning? Did the students learn what they were supposed to learn (according to the curriculum) during the two weeks of Sisters Academy? According to a questionnaire the school sent out after the end of Sisters Academy #01: Yes they did. Most students were thrilled with the experience; a small group were less content and had felt challenged. One of the major challenges was the shift of language from Danish (Swedish, Icelandic) to English. To suddenly have to understand and discuss maths or other subjects taught in English required a willingness to adapt, but, for most students, this also helped them to enter the otherworldliness of Sisters Academy and it quickly became the natural way to communicate. The major difference was, however, in the sensuous approach to teaching:

During these two weeks on Sisters Academy I've learned that school is so much more than sitting on a chair and reading a text. It brought me knowledge – even from the first day – about how I learn differently from just sitting on a chair to telling a story with my entire body... Posted on March 5, 2014 by student.

For the majority of students Sisters Academy became a personal journey, finding new openings and potentials for personal growth on many different levels. Some expressed that they felt more complete afterwards and much more energized.

The performers and their performance were unique and bizarre. By bizarre, I mean extraordinary – spectacular. I have no words. I use these words, and feelings I can't even describe, because this wasn't just a new ... educational path that became apparent to me. I redeemed (edited: liberated) myself from a lot of personal boundaries, and it became a personal journey. I could see myself – things and people, in a new perspective. My long talks with Yaa, the medicine woman, The Gardener and Skyggen (The Shadow) made me aware of my inner (and outer) self. What I am capable of, and how I should treat others and myself. For that, I am forever grateful. Thank you.... Posted on March 20, 2014 by student.

...Every morning when I woke up, I wanted to wake up. My alarm clock wasn't my enemy anymore, but instead it became my morning-mockingbird, ready to wake me up. Morning after morning, I looked forward to the day that was about to flourish. Each and every day grew to be a beautiful, fragrant rose... Posted on March 20, 2014 by student.

Transformative Learning

The question often posed in projects like this is whether it would have any lasting impact. In much of our collected data and the blog posts, it appears that Sisters Academy has had a long-lasting and transformative influence on students and teachers alike. We would argue that the different steps of the poetic-self process reinforce transformative learning. The first step is individual and internal. It involves primary thought processes, dreamlike states of immersing oneself in a sensuous universe of images and memories. This is the opening for sensuous learning.

The next step concerns secondary thought processes of conceptualizing and naming the poetic self, which is then shared with others (moving from the individual to the collective). After this, each person is asked to create a tableau (individual). This involves visualizing and externalizing internal images through presentational knowing; that is, putting sensuous experiences into material form and making them tangible. The final step of making an interactivity design involves embodiment in a collective context. By trying out what it means to embody one's poetic self in relation to others, there is a much greater possibility of a lasting effect (Pelias 2008). The body has memory, and embodying the new-found expansion of self leaves memory traces that can be replayed later. By potentially empowering the participants through the means and methods described above, the seed of poetry and the understanding of expanded potential are nurtured in the participant—be it Sisters staff, students, teachers or visitors. Once the seed blossoms, it lives within us; we own our own poetry, so to speak. Several of the blogposts contain words and phrases like *'forever'*, *'huge impression'*, *'it made me see the world in a new light'* and, not least, *'I will remember what happened at the Academy for as long as the Moon swims the seas of the galaxy'*.

In the Takeover-format, we work with a large-scale anchoring and integration ritual within the performative framework. This happens on the last day of the manifestation. Every teacher shares at least three inspirations from their experience with sensuous learning that they commit themselves to integrating in their lessons for up to two years after Sisters Academy. This sharing happens at a collective ritual where all students, staff and school management participate. Once they have shared their commitments, they are invited to take a seed and plant it in their office, at home or wherever they find most suitable as a physical reminder. We also revisit the schools 2–3 months after the manifestation for a shared evaluation and reflection and to emphasize the importance of anchoring the experience at the school. Many schools sustain the changes, for instance, two of the schools have established permanent rooms inspired by the spatial changes during the manifestation, which allowed teachers and students to navigate, teach and learn differently. As Sisters Academy is a project that tends to make the invisible visible through its radical sensuous approach, it may in fact be hard to ignore the need for change afterwards.

Ramifications

Sisters Academy is a lifelong project which is continuously refined and elaborated from iteration to iteration. Since 2014, there have been six manifestations of the Academy and such manifestations will continue in the future. We perceive Sisters Academy as a spiral intervention, which does not only move back and forth, but moves in continuously expanding cycles. Every time we manifest, participants from previous manifestations may join us in one form or another. For example, a teacher who took part in Sisters Academy #1 joined us at Sisters Academy #3, The Boarding School at Inkonst, Sweden, with his leader approving this use of his time regarding his explorations at the Academy as sensuous learning competence development. During this manifestation, he met another visiting researcher from Roskilde University, Denmark, with whom he founded a sensuous writing forum. There are several similar examples. In this perspective, the impact relates to integrating changes and seizing small opportunities that may arise in the cracks of the everyday life at the school. Pioneer projects that unfold at an intersection cannot necessarily be judged using conventional evaluation tools. The actual value here is found in what can be called ramifications, planting seeds in the individual participant which, in turn, sprout and propagate in unforeseeable ways. This brings value to very different environments and is beneficial to professionals in a rich variety of ways.

In Sisters Academy, we plant these seeds through the experience of the poetic self. Once you unfold your inherent poetic potential, learn how to give it an image, expand and externalize it into space, and create an interactivity design to establish new, more sensuous modes of meeting and learning, this lives within you, follows you and you may carry it with you into various different contexts.

Lessons Learned

As illustrated above, Sisters Academy primarily provides a framework for exploration based on new sensuous premises, which break with previous assumptions, rather than a manual on how to teach in new ways.

Thus, the teachers develop innovative practices with inspiration from this new framework and the workshops provided in the preparatory process. How each teacher works from these new sensuous premises, both during the Takeover and afterwards, fluctuates. Sisters Academy is a highly complex project, which is also its strength, because there is always a new layer to delve into. It is potentially a lifetime project for Hallberg and Sisters Hope. When new people become involved, whether performers, teachers or students, not every aspect of the entire project is introduced in detail. The overall framework is introduced as a frame of opportunity with layers of diverse dimensions that can be explored, depending on areas of resonance.

Furthermore, Sisters Academy is a framework with a meta-layer. A lot of dialogue and reflection on the project takes place while it is going on, both in an organic and in a more structured way. We can talk about how we work with the premises and how this makes us feel, including our frustrations, inspirations and curiosities related to 'the invasion'. This happens organically and spontaneously. Frustrations are far from 'illegal'—quite the contrary, they create an opportunity for deeper reflection and innovation in relation to both participating teachers' own classes and the project as a whole, which is continuously refined during each manifestation. But we also work with more structured opportunities to share, such as daily teachers' meetings between old and new staff and daily morning assemblies for the entire school. Another 'structured opportunity' is the 'Octopus function', which is a performative body consisting of one or more conjoined performers. Both old and new staff are invited to visit The Octopus during the first day of the manifestation and share their work with her. Based on this information The Octopus makes buddy-pairs (one old and one new staff member) so that people have at least one person they can share any reflections or questions with. In addition, teachers (old staff) are invited to live and stay with the Sisters staff (new staff) during the manifestation.

In fact, we always reflect—also while enacting our practice. Inspired by Rorty's pragmatism, Lehmann suggests a position as a 'pragmatic dualist' for the study of your own practice. Lehmann claims that it is possible to be both an 'experiencing practitioner' and an 'analysing researcher', but not simultaneously, because the two modes of

perception cannot coexist: “*You can’t reflect on the trance while you are in it*” (Lehmann 2002, p. 266) (our translation). This is, however, not true for us. We have found that we do reflect while we perform our artistic practice, and that the actions within the otherworldly space we inhabit and the subsequent analyses are based on these in situ reflections. We would even go as far as to claim that our reflections are deeper in the lived situation as our whole body, our whole being co-reflects with our mind in these particular situations.

Insider Advice

The process of Sisters Academy is characterized by iterations, spiral processes and continuous refinement. A valuable lesson learned is how we go about and understand the articulation of post-reflection and evaluation. We begin with a critical question: How could a framed, time- and space-limited, evaluation ever contain the same depth as all these in situ reflections conceived over time and time again? A framed evaluation will always only provide a crack through which to peek into the world of ongoing and constant reflections and a multitude of embodied learning points. The question is therefore: how can we make this crack as valuable as possible? And what values are at play in our evaluations? Our experience is that, for some people, the value concerns meeting with others and articulating their inner world collectively as a personal anchoring and integration ritual. To others, sharing may have the opposite effect and can be draining. We are therefore concerned with how to create a framework for collective post-manifestation reflections which is both inspiring, integrative, anchoring and non-draining, and which is constructive both individually and collectively.

We have found that it is often more interesting to evaluate when considering how key learning points can become points for refining future manifestations or, as here, serve as advice to others. We understand the learning points as the quintessential learning to be gleaned from the manifestation that is being evaluated; as ‘gems’ or as seeds that can be planted in the soil and nurtured so that they can later be harvested for use in future manifestations. All the while, we must never compromise

the beauty of the sensuous and poetic—of that which happened that cannot be spoken.

The Critical Gaze and the Devoted Body

In the aftermath of the Swedish manifestation of Sisters Academy, The Boarding School in 2015, Hallberg developed the theoretical pairing of the critical gaze and the devoted body as a way to understand some of the participatory dynamics at play in Sisters Academy. Hallberg is currently researching this dynamic further in her ongoing Ph.D.-work (Hallberg 2018, forthcoming), where she argues that even though they are always intertwined the critical gaze links to the perception of a situation from a distanced and potentially critical perspective (Gade and Schultz 2016) (Butt 2008). Whereas the devoted body links to a process of embodied immersion (Machon 2013) in the experiment (Massumi 2015). This corresponds with an interesting finding in our readings of previous data material in the Sisters Academy archive study group. It became apparent that students who were totally immersed in the manifestations lacked words (primary thought process) and thus could not describe their experiences in their notebooks, instead leaving them empty, doodling, ripping out pages or making paper collages. Interestingly, those who watched from a distance with a critical gaze had a lot to say and were highly articulate (secondary thought process). This may not be true for all produced archive data, but it is an interesting observation in terms of also understanding the diversity of ways in which we express ourselves. We should leave a gap for the innovation of evaluation in the school of a sensuous society. We need to harvest the gems, but while doing so, we must treat poetry with care. Our interest is in how a fruitful and constructive alliance between reflexive, cognitive processes can coexist with the sensuous, intuitive and devoted movements of the immersed body. We believe that this alliance has deep transformative potential for professionals, as well as prospectively pointing towards new, and perhaps more sustainable, futures.

Appendix: Using Performance Methods to Foster Inherent Poetic Potential and Sensuous Learning

See Figs. 5, 6, 7.



Fig. 5 The Sisters staff, The Nurse, in her tableaux at the upper secondary school Nova Academy, Simrishamn, Sweden. Photo: I diana lindhardt

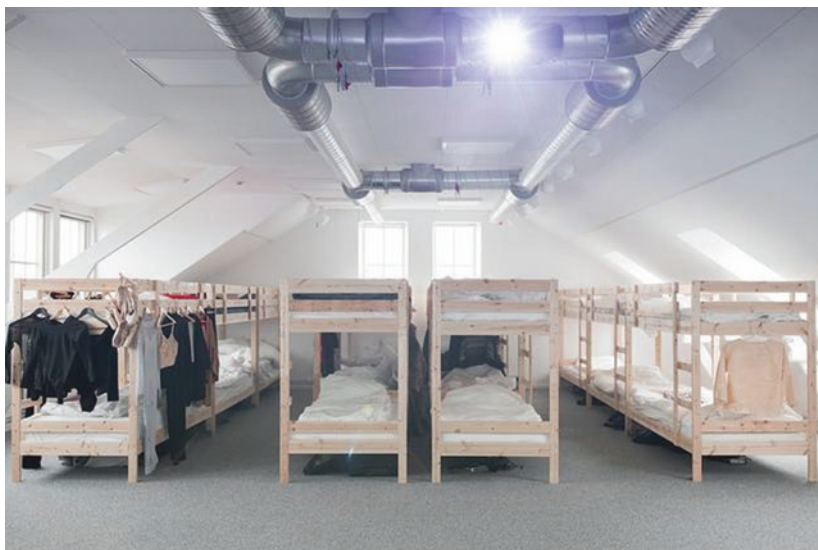


Fig. 6 Sisters staff dormitory installed at the upper secondary school Nova Academy, Simrishamn, Sweden. Photo: I diana lindhardt



Fig. 7 The math teachers, 'The sisters of Math' at HF & VUC FYN, FLOW in Odense, Denmark. Photo: Frame from documentary film on Sisters Academy#1 by Meeto Worre Kronborg Grevsen, We Make Colours

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