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Published in:

Beyond Methods. Lessons from the arts to qualitative research

2015

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Houmann, A. (2015). The Key to the Life-World. Unlocking research questions through expressive objects. In L. Bresler (Ed.), *Beyond Methods. Lessons from the arts to qualitative research* (Vol. 10, pp. 125-139). (Perspectives in Music and Music Education). Malmö: Lund University, Malmö Academy of Music.

Total number of authors:

1

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CHAPTER 10

The key to the life-world—Unlocking research questions through expressive objects

ANNA HOUMANN



This chapter describes a study that explored creative art as a research tool. Music teacher students created a three dimensional object designed to express their understanding and experience of the term “music teacher”. In interviews, music teachers and music teacher students described and explored the objects and how they reflected their lived experience of the phenomenon *discretionary power*, within a phenomenological framework. I define discretionary power as to have the opportunity and knowledge to exercise one’s own professional judgment in carrying out and making decisions in daily work.

Music teachers’ professional work may be studied from a broad range of perspectives. My study centres on music teachers’ descriptions of their perceived possibilities and limitations in the everyday work from a phenomenological perspective. My overall theoretical point of departure is the assumption of the *life-world* as the complex, everyday world wherein we live our lives. The life-world is a world that is already there for us, it is a given world and

the world in which all science begins and ends. This assumption stems from the life-world concepts developed by Husserl (1970), Schütz (1953/1999) and Merleau-Ponty (1962/1999). This conception lies behind my understanding of the life-world as an intentional, lived and social world, and my understanding of research as the study of lived experience.

This chapter focuses on the methodological and pedagogical processes of studying experience in order to unveil the lived experience, by using an expressive object created by the students as a key to the life-world. I will tell the story of the lessons I learnt from art in research by focusing on creative art as a research tool. Here, I use or interpret the concept of “Art” as comprising expressive objects, created out of a personal drive to convey a message, mood, or symbolism for the perceiver to interpret. Heidegger (1971) and Merleau-Ponty (1964) interpret art as the means by which a community develops for itself a medium for self-expression and interpretation. Let the story begin.

The story of the objects

As a child I used to spend my weekends and vacations with my mother and brother at various museums, exhibitions and churches. When travelling around Europe we saw more of the walls of exhibition halls than the actual city we were visiting. My childhood evolved around these winding journeys in a search to unveil the world of fine art, architecture, music, dance, theatre etc. In all of those places there was a story to be found, a story to be told. And if there were not one available my mother would tell us one or ask us to make one up. Every art work, building, piece of music, movement or character had a story, told or untold, ready for us to convey. I resemble all other human beings in terms of the story-filled nature of my life, but I have come back to the idea of story again and again because it intrigues me. Working as a composer, music teacher, music teacher educator and researcher I recognize that stories come into our lives in many disguises—often we are not even aware of them as stories.

Wilson (2006) and Zeldin (1998) suggest the need for story literacy in order to manage the complex communications of education and professional work. Story literacy includes the social skills of managing stories in conversation—both in listening to the stories of others, in recognising the gist or the point that is being made—and the need to be able to respond, appropriately, sometimes with another story. This idea is easily transferred to music education since musicians communicate through, in and about music using similar skills to manage the story that evolves through musical conversations. As a music teacher educator I make use of these musical communication skills and develop them further by using different means of reflection through story. To take just one example, my students in the first course of their music teacher education first writes an autobiography and then in collaboration compose a piece using the soundtrack of their lives as a focal point (Houmann, 2015). However, not only can story mean many different things but there is also a vast number of purposes for telling and some are beneficial for the teller and some for the listener.

My initial motivation for using an expressive object to construct meaning was the wish to devise a way of eliciting stories both as a music teacher educator and later as a researcher. “Whatever form a story takes”, Plummer (1995) reminds us, “it is not simply the lived life. It speaks all around life: it provides routes into a life, lays down maps for lives to follow, suggest links between a life and a culture” (p. 186). Gauntlett (2007) describes the construction of Lego structures as means of exploring ideas and identity—and maybe stories too. In this case the expressive objects played an important role in supporting multisensory approaches to reflecting on learning instead of writing. In addition, a lot of work has been carried out arguing for the recognition of academic intelligence as something which is not predicated on writing, but on other modes of embodying and expressing knowledge (James, 2007; Pink, 2008; West, 2009; Robinson, 2011; James & Brookfield, 2013; 2014). Expressive objects thus served as prompts in my research study, or rather, as keys to open up the life-worlds of the interviewees.

Accessing the life-world—the three dimensional objects

Even though a life-world researcher tries to get knowledge, through experience, about the life-world of others, this does not mean you have clear access to it. Much of the time, experienced professionals in both education and other fields cannot explain what they are doing, or tell you what they know; and students cannot articulate their learning. Yet professional development and practice are often discussed as if conscious understanding and deliberation are of the essence. Whatever the researcher choose to study depends, amongst other things, on what assumptions they have about the reality they are about to study and what experience consists of. These assumptions may either comprise our implicit everyday conceptions or they can be explicitly chosen.

In my doctoral dissertation (Houmann, 2010) music teachers and music teacher students lived experience of discretionary power was studied through interviews. In total 30 interviews were conducted. In an effort to access the life-worlds of others, expressive objects, such as those in Figure 1, were used as a focal point for the interviews.



Figure 3: Examples of the three-dimensional objects created by music teacher students (Houmann, 2010)

The objects were constructed by music teacher students during a course as part of the teacher training. Their task was to describe the work of the multifaceted music teacher by creating a

three dimensional object representing the role of the “multi dimensional music teacher”. In doing so the students highlighted the concepts, qualities or skills they believed to be inherent in the role of the “multi dimensional music teacher”. The purpose of the course task was to give the students an opportunity, in the form of a practical exercise, to describe the web of musical, pedagogical and sociological experiences that a music teacher creates in his or her work.

One can view the creation of the objects as a figuration of the life-world as an intentional world, lived world and a social world (Bengtsson, 1999, 1962/1999; Schütz, 1953/1999). The life-world as an intentional world derives from an understanding that human consciousness is intentional. It means that people’s experiences are both experiences in themselves and experiences of something. The life-world as a lived world is characterised by a presumption of a world that includes both human beings and phenomena. The life-world as a social world means that people who live, think and take action are not just individuals but are part of a social context. The objects the students created should engage with the ideas they had about teachers’ *discretionary power*, teachers’ possibilities and limitations in their everyday work. In this way the creation of the object was designed to initiate a reflection on the development of the role of teacher, where theory and practice constitute two sides of the same coin. My understanding of discretionary power as having the opportunity and knowledge to exercise one’s own professional judgment in carrying out and making decisions in daily work may be compared to Berg’s (2003) definition of professionalism as “a question of carrying out a job taking both the formal commission and the actual conditions into consideration” (p. 53). Whereas Berg emphasizes two prerequisites, the formal organisation and the actual conditions, the definition in my study stresses the relational nature of discretion and teachers’ work.

The purpose of creating the objects in the course was to give visual and kinaesthetic form to the concept of discretionary power and to what a music teacher “should” be like. The assignment was designed in such a way as to contain linkages between the theory of the discretionary power and experience. At the same time it created prerequisites for the students, with the help of the visualisation, to transfer their thoughts from the immediate and concrete to more abstract and theoretical reasoning

The students’ objects are all unique and the capacity for invention and the creativity is apparent when you hold or look at the objects. The students have painted, sewn, baked, woven, welded, cut, clipped, glued, plastered and used ceramics. They have written on paper, cloth, leather, wood, clay, candy, bread, fruit, pasta, plastic, glass, CD, vinyl records and even in steel. Most of the students reported that they started the process with the concepts, personal qualities and knowledge they wanted to bring to the making of the object, and then looked for a suitable shape. Some students created or started with an existent shape and connected it to the words they had chosen (see Figure 1 for some examples).

The purpose behind using the expressive objects as a “key” to the life-world, for me as a researcher, was to discuss fundamental methodological assumptions about possible approaches to the empirical study of lived experience. Above all it came to methodologically consider an approach to question the researcher as a part of the life-world. A phenomenological approach is expressed by the ambition to be open to different possibilities to follow the direction of the research question, to be open to my own and others pre-understanding of the researched phenomena and thereby to open up for new experiences (Gadamer, 1960/2004; van Manen, 1997).

The inspiration for using the models as a research method was Bengtssons (1999) exhortation to employ “methodological creativity” (p. 32). He describes the research problem, research question and method as being intertwined, something that will have implications for the actions of the researcher in empirical studies:

It is necessary for the life-world researcher to seek out arenas where experiences, impressions and actions etc. are embodied in worldly situations and in connection with the researcher’s participation in the activities being pursued there, it is also natural for him or her to take part in the ongoing discussion there. (Bengtsson, 1999, p. 37)

The objects in my study served as to develop strategies to empirically research discretionary power as lived experience and can be described as an interwoven part of the work to transfer lived experience to written research report (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

To conduct research, employing a phenomenological approach, involves the researcher experiencing the phenomena with the aspiration to deepen his or her understanding of the meaning of the lived experience.

On the one hand it [the understanding of nature of lived experience] means that phenomenological research requires of the researcher that he or she stands in the fullness of life, in the midst of the world of living relations and shared situations. On the other hand it means that the researcher actively explores the category of lived experience in all its modalities and aspects. (van Manen, 1997, p. 32)

I considered myself as the “familiar” (Plummer, 2001, p. 209) as a participant during the making of the objects as well as the empirical study. This implies that I was familiar with the persons involved in the study since I resided in the context of “teacher training”. In terms of the research method it gave the study a life-world in the shape of an object, which at the same time afforded an opportunity to create a distance, to make the known unknown, and be able to hold the life-world “in your hand” during the interviews (Houmann, 2010). A phenomenological approach means, amongst other things, to be open to our experiences as researchers (Gadamer, 1960/2004). In connection with the objects a research strategy incorporating flexibility and sensitivity was developed. When it came to concerns about the researcher’s reflexivity, I reconsidered my pre-understanding of discretionary power. The

insight that my previous experiences had significance for what I recognised was not in itself sufficient. On a concrete level the problems involved documenting interviews at the same time as I was involved in the context I was researching. It came down to shaping strategies to research the experience at the same time as it was lived. At the same time the documentation and the reflection of the object led to a continuous struggle to direct my attention, time and time again, to the complex character of the phenomenon of discretionary power. In that way my understanding of discretionary power, as a complex phenomenon, deepened in line with my new experience of discretionary power. Assumptions previously taken for granted became, during the creation of the objects, both unclear and contradictory. For example, I was constantly reminded that the phenomenon in the descriptions that I formulated as a foundation for the planned study rather portrayed “my” discretionary power than a complex phenomenon. It contributed to my returning to the initial research questions that gave direction to the study.

In previous research (Bouij, 1998; Bladh, 2002; Lindgren, 2006) music teachers’ professional socialisation is seen as the interplay between two opposite identities, the musician and the teacher. The result of my study points in another direction; the identities are interwoven with each other. One explanation for this could be that the created objects work as a “key” in the interviews and simultaneously as interpretations of a complex teacher role. In the object there is interplay between thought, knowledge and action from a holistic view on their future profession where both “identities” exist side by side and are seen as each other’s prerequisites rather than oppositions. Hence there is only one identity with various facets and therefore the students created one object, one entity, when they visualized the role of the music teacher, as explained by one informant with reference to the object in Figure 2.

This is one object. Not two. This is everything in one unity. The music and the teacher and the musician is in the same... They are dependent of each other and influence each other. They are a one sided coin. If you stimulate one you immediately stimulate the other. If I believed it to be a difference I would have created two objects. (S6)



Figure 4: The object produced by informant S6 (Houmann, 2010)

One possible result of the study is that the objects portrayed the role of the music teacher as both unique and composed exactly as in the life-world, in the tension between theory and practice, between opportunities and limitations and between the identities of musician and teacher. In this way the expressive objects may be parallel to interviews in research, or any other research tools. That is why the descriptions of the phenomenon of discretionary power in a world that is equally dependent on “the experiencing and acting subject as the subject is dependent on the world” (Bengtsson, 2009, p. 65).

Methodological principles

A drawing (or a painting, photograph, and so on) is first and foremost an expression of its medium. (White, 2011, nr 5)

I have always been interested in (or rather obsessed by) the relationship between form and content, as a researcher, teacher, artist and human being. The quotation just above translated into research terms would be; the method is the research first identity. It is secondarily about what it depicts. Form shapes content. A poorly executed study remains insignificant as a poorly executed image remains insignificant. A well-constructed image of something seemingly insignificant can be masterful. In all great work, the subject and the means by which it is rendered are inseparable. As White (2011) put it “master your technique to protect your content” (p. 15). A phenomenological approach means that the research question determines the researchers approach to the context of the phenomenon. It implies that when the researcher answers the research question the meaning of the studied phenomenon appears and the understanding of phenomenon deepens. The research question shapes the study and it is to the question the researcher returns to check what has been done and to set a new course. During the empirical study the researcher lives the research question and in that way anchors the study in the lived experience.

In the arts as well in research, compositional variation is limitless. Composition is the foundation of object making as well as preparing an empirical study. It is the spatial relationship between all the parts. Whether it is an expressive object or an object of a research study, how something is composed determines its appearance, its feel, and its meaning. Studying discretionary power as lived experience, as I did in my thesis, implies a composition to “study the world in its full concretion as it shows itself for equally concrete existing people” (Bengtsson, 1999, p. 32). Preparations for the empirical study were governed by the question of possibilities to access the life-world of others using lessons from the art; letting the form shape the content. In a first step a flexible and sensitive approach evolved into an issue of “being there”, when I considered how to empirically study lived experience using an expressive object. Seeing art as a continuing dialogue that stretches back through the years, research through arts is a contribution to that dialogue. Observation lies at the heart of the art process. Whether the expressive object is derived from mimicking nature or extrapolating a mental construct, the powers of observation are critical. Using the object as method for

conducting research enhanced the opportunity to “be there” and to “study the world in its full concretion”.

Which research method is used can be seen as a question, within one’s chosen theoretical framework, considering the possibilities of different methods to contribute to a deepened understanding of a phenomenon. Different methods are thereby connected to different theoretical presumptions, which means that no matter which method or work technique is used the basis of choice should be clarified (Silverman, 2006). As in research as in arts, this discussion (not a monologue) is between you and the object/study you’re constructing; searching for the inner logic, responding to it, trying not to impose ideas that don’t fit the direction the conversation is taking. In this case the object may contain information that arrives without conscious understanding of how it got there. If not alert and observant, you might miss it or work over it. Hence the research questions were used as a guide when doubt occurred at a crossroad of choices. To answer the main research question of the study “What does discretionary power mean to music teachers and music teacher students?” the created object was used as a focal point with the ambition to access what in the “context of discretionary power” could be questioned, to direct attention to the meaning of the phenomenon.

Interview questions were formulated on the basis of the insight that “to be able to ask you must want to know, i e know, that you don’t know” (Gadamer, 1960/1997, p. 174). The empirical study was thereby an interview study in the sense that I interviewed music teachers and music teacher students. However what makes the study a phenomenological study is the fact that the research questions both draws attention to and open up for possible new meanings (Gadamer, 1960/2004). It is by living the research question that the researcher orients herself towards the focus of research to be able to get near to the meaning of experience and to thereby answer the question. According to White (2011), quoted, above, art is the means by which a culture describes itself to itself. Translated into a lesson learnt, those descriptions, in turn, form our sense of how we see ourselves in the present and in relation to the past. They embody our ideas and sensibilities. Meaning does not exist in the singular.

A life-world phenomenological approach as a theoretical perspective means that it emanates from people’s different life-worlds and thereby allows the complexity of the life-world and the divergence of different qualities to emerge. Every phenomenon is intertwined with its context and its participants. It appears as something to someone. The focus of research, i. e. discretionary power as lived experience always appears from someone’s point of view (Houmann, 2010). The phenomenological question is to raise the question about the meaning of the phenomenon and thereby also “to be addressed by the question of what something is “really” like. What is the nature of this lived experience?” (van Manen, 1997, p. 42).

The collection of data through the expressive objects—unlocking the door to the life-world

The expressive objects in my study came to function as concrete possibilities to maintain the focus on the points in question and to obtain an oscillation between nearness and distance. Using the object as a focal point the interview method contributed to “exploring or gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of human phenomenon” (van Manen, 1997, p. 66) and the expressive objects were used as “a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience” (p. 66). Hence an oscillation between lessons learnt from arts in research and lesson learnt from research in arts.

In the study the interviewees were asked to talk about and to describe the objects. They got to describe the content, form and the possible interplay between different parts. In this part of the interview the interviewees were asked to describe the object as an artist would be asked to speak about his or her work. The work, seen as the starting point, and ending point, of its content, was discussed in six stages; describe completely, and in detail, what you see, and only what you see, in your object; assess the literal or metaphorical content that you see revealed in your description; trace the influences that gave birth to the content you see; avoid interpretations of what you may think or feel but which is not present in the actual object; describe how the object’s content is revealed by its form and how its form is dictated by its content; weave a direct, coherent narrative that tells the story uncovered by the above.

A lesson learnt from art in research during the interviews using the expressive objects was that the objects occupy the same space as our bodies do. Their physical presence is different from that of a two-dimensional artefact. Three-dimensional objects challenge and confront us physically. They are not dependent on the spatial illusion present in most two-dimensional work, even abstract works. It seems as if an expressive object never has to justify its reality. It simply is. Physical presence is a form of power (Houmann, 2010). Focusing on the object helped the interviewees to “get back on track”. Some examples of questions I asked are “have you yourself experienced what the object visualises?”, “can you give me an example of how the object might resolve this situation?”, “how would this object go about when developing its discretionary power?”.

Another lesson learnt from art in research during the collection of data was that the interviews using the expressive object as a focal point were, like art, a language of signs and symbols. To describe new conditions, new signs must be created or old symbols must be redeployed in ways that give them new meaning. Given that the world is constantly changing and that each new generation describes the world it sees in its own way, the symbolic language of art must always be evolving. Henri Matisse (quoted by Louis Aragon, 1972, p. 57) stated, “The importance of an artist is to be determined by the number of new signs he introduces into the language of art”. In that respect the focus of the interviews concerned

knowledge that the interviewees for the most part had not reflected upon but taken for granted. Some of them express this in terms of lacking words or concepts to describe discretionary power but the object helped them along the way. One example of this is informant L7 talking about Figure 3.

I: Discretionary power could be...It is difficult to explain what discretionary power really is, when you start to think about it. Well you...how should I explain this...You know what it is, but explaining it is another thing...Of course looking at the object I can clearly say that it is thinking inside or outside the box... (L7)



Figure 5: The object discussed by informant L7

This quotation shows that both the situation as such and object encouraged the interviewee to reflect about the phenomenon of discretionary power. In a number of cases the interviewees said that during the conversation about the object they had arrived at an insight about what discretionary power means, an insight they did not have before the conversation. I see this as an example of what Merleau-Ponty (1964) describes as a dialectic reflection. In this situation an object also stimulated the dialectic reflection. According to Giorgi (1983) reflection means “to bend back upon or take up again what we have experienced, lived through or acted upon prereflectively” (pp. 142-143). This may be linked to the idea that art has no boundaries except those imposed by the needs of the maker. A lesson learnt from art in research, from analysing the expressive objects, is that boundaries, in the sense of limitations and possibilities, are a form of definition, nothing more. They are a way to create a hierarchy of concerns, interests and priorities. Boundaries change all the time. That is part of what art does and this could perhaps also be true for research. By defining an area of interest or by stating a new priority, art allows us to create new definitions of ourselves and the context in which we operate. To blur a boundary is to confuse the definition. To move a boundary is to make a new definition.

With the help of the object the interviewees and I engaged in building a “bridge” between our life-worlds. We directed our consciousness towards the other with an interest in the meaning that submerges through the story of the other.

In the experience of dialogue, there is constituted between the other person and myself a common ground; my thought and his are inter-woven into a single fabric, my words and those of my interlocutor are called forth by the state of the discussion, and they are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is

the creator. We have here a dual being, where the other is for me no longer a mere bit of behaviour in my transcendental field, nor I in his; we are collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity. Our perspectives merge into each other, and we co-exist through a common world. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1999, p. 413)

The created object has been described above as a “key to the life-world”. During the interview it also had a function as an interview guide. It can be described as a movement between the familiar and the unfamiliar, where the familiar made it possible to formulate questions and the unfamiliar challenged my pre-understanding of the phenomenon at hand.

With the object as a work technique the ambition was to create a foundation, or in Gadamer’s (1960/2004) terms, to acquire a horizon, to use the work technique of interview to put myself in the situation of the other. The object became something the interviewees and I could both use as a point of reference and as an example when we wanted to make something explicit or clear, or when we were not sure we understood what the other person meant.

All recollections of experiences, reflections on experiences, descriptions of experiences, taped interviews about experiences, or transcribed conversations about experiences are already transformations of those experiences. Even life captured directly on magnetic or light-sensitive tape is already transformed at the moment it is captured. Without this dramatic elusive element of lived meaning to our reflective attention phenomenology might not be necessary. So, the upshot is what we need to find access to life’s living dimensions while realizing that the meaning we bring to the surface from the depths of life’s oceans have already lost the natural quiver of their undisturbed existence. (van Manen, 1997, p. 54)

Methodological implications of working with expressive objects

Working with the objects as a research method comprises a set of activities combining metaphorical modelling and conversations to explore a complex issue. Its technique draws heavily on stories and the use of metaphor through representing one thing in the form of another. According to Schön’s view (1971) metaphors are a means of creating radically different ways of understanding things. An illustration of this is when “a music teacher student, trying to make a three dimensional object of the multifaceted music teacher, had a breakthrough when she observed that ‘a music teacher is a kind of pump’” (Houmann, 2010, p.45). An aeroplane is therefore not just (or even) a plane; a builder might use it to indicate concepts, values, or embody clichés (“high flier”, “the sky’s the limit”, “I grew wings”). A green plant is not just something for the window ledge, it may signify growth, inspiration, abundance, or it may not be a plant at all, but hair or energy. A red rectangular piece, the archetypical brick of the early Lego packs, is not just a plastic geometric shape; rather it may be heat, passion, a shoe, a person.

Bengtsson (1999) argues that the researcher is always part of the life-world and that fundamental assumptions about the world always have to be made explicit. Using the objects as a method gave me the opportunity to distance myself from my previous experience of the

research phenomenon and in that way open myself up to the different ways the phenomenon appears. “To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, p. 82). Whatever we know, we know from the world that surrounds us. Art studies the world, in all its manifestations, and renders back to us not simply how we see, but how we react to what we see and what we know as a consequence of that seeing. The world is the source of all of our relationships, social and political as well as aesthetic. Throughout the research process I moved, through the object, between different point of views and my interest directed itself towards knowledge as an opportunity to see the situation in which we reside in a light (Houmann, 2010).

To acquire an awareness of a situation is, however, always a task of peculiar difficulty. The very idea of a situation means that we are not standing outside it and hence are unable to have any objective knowledge of it. [...] We always find ourselves within a situation, and throwing light on it is a task that is never entirely finished. (Gadamer, 1960/2004, p. 30)

In this way the usage of the object developed strategies to empirically research discretionary power as lived experience. The object, and the material gained by using the object, can be understood as a specific perspective on the world. It can be described as a widened perspective in the respect that it is not limited to a personal point of view, at the same time as the perspective takes its focal point in people’s subjective experiences in the world and the possibilities that appears are grounded in the life-world.

The empirical material of the study has taken shape between the researcher, the interviewees and the objects in the interviews. The phenomenological contribution to the base of knowledge can be understood as communication between people. The object can be described as a common arena for the analytic process, where “my” point of view of the world changes in interaction with other peoples’ interpretations of the “same” world. The intersubjectivity, in that sense, replaces the meaning of the concept objectivity through a new joint meaning about what “new” knowledge can contribute with limits to what can be seen as valid or possible (scientific) knowledge.

The richness of variation in creating the objects highlights the phenomenon of the study, discretionary power, as complex and multi-faceted. The research results directs the attention towards the life-world as a world of “both...and” (Bengtsson, 2005, p. 4). The life-world is described through the objects as harmonic and contradictory, common and unique, thematic and rhapsodic. A methodological contribution can in this way be described as a contribution to more possibilities to see the world in a new light, by using the objects. This means that the results of the study should not be perceived as answers to what the world “is really like”, but rather descriptions of how it could be. In that sense the objects function as a method with a point of view in which the world appears as a possible world. The phenomenon, discretionary power, appears as intertwined by body and thought, embodied, situated in the life-world. In

the social world the identity of the embodied subject is constituted “by the worldly experiences of the subject” (Bengtsson, 2009, p. 65).

A circularity between language and experience also surfaced in using the objects. In the interviews the interviewees had the possibility to express their lived experience of the phenomenon with the help of the objects. Experiences of discretionary power were something mainly perceived as taken for granted and knowledge consisted of pre-reflexive knowledge. During the interviews the interviewees had the opportunity to try to understand and verbalize this experience through reflexion. Many of the interviewees said that they had learnt quite a lot about the phenomenon during the creation of the objects and it was the interviewees themselves that verbalized the meaning of the phenomenon without me contributing any statements. This can be understood in relation to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of language (1964), where a central aspect is the relation between the signified (experience) and the significant (to create an object). By expressing the experiences of the phenomenon as verbalized through art, the experiences are cognitively confirmed and the learning at hand can be used constructively later in life. This also correlates with Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the concept of segmentation; through experience people collect embodied structures of meaning, which are used in other situations to create meaning to new experiences. Segmentation can constantly be changed through new experiences (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). In a life-world perspective language can also have a crucial role, but is seen as a means of describing a phenomenon. The focus is on the phenomenon not on language.

The end of the story?

As a researcher and teacher educator, I found that the method described in this chapter may have an important place in researching music education, because music teachers are, at their core, makers and storytellers. One has a different understanding of a piece of music or an object, how it does what it does, if one knows the details and processes of its creation intimately. This is one reason imitation has always been a part of music training. Music teachers assimilate a whole range of psychological, aesthetic, political, and emotional data points, and they then make music or music lessons to organize and give meaning to them. This takes skill and practice, working in tandem with intelligence and keen observation. But without the tools to research lived experience, it is like trying to capture air with a net – and often about as effective. Basic form-giving skills help the interviewees bridge the gap between cognitive beliefs and implicit beliefs and embodiment. The objects serve as demonstrations of what the words are largely about: how we learn through observing and attempting to capture ideas. The issues we encounter as researchers of art are life lessons and should always stay with us. Without them, we are not researchers of life. And so the story continues.

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