

## **What if, we dare to open our minds to explore?**

**The strategic partnership Erasmus + project Entrepreneurial Challenges in Theatre Higher Education Curricula – San Miniato, Italy, July 5-24, 2019**

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For me, San Miniato (SM) has been a landmark; personally and professionally. SM has offered me new inspiring insights to explore and develop in my teaching approach and my research in the future. Below I try to share some personal and professional reflection on what I explored, learned and which knowledge I gained. I attended in SM July 14- 24, 2019.

First, I would like to mention that it has been not only interesting but also wonderful to enter the community of the Erasmus+ research team, who has been on a journey for two years developing the field of artistic entrepreneurship together. In November 2018 I shortly meet the core team since I offered a “material sampling” workshop at the “Expanding Crafts and Disrupting Routines in Time and Space” teacher’s seminar held in Copehagen. My contribution to the seminar was only half a day and therefore, I did not know the team apart from collaborating on a more daily basis with my local colleague Rikke Lund Heinsen (part of the core team) from Copenhagen.

As newcomer to the core research team and to the SM group in general, my experience was to be welcomed with generosity and open arms. It seems as a fact, that the core research team has different mindsets, options and backgrounds both professionally and nationally, but I do think, it is within their diversity they have found the courage to dare to listen and challenge each other, and maybe therefor, has become a strong and open-minded research community. A generously research community welcoming everyone in SM to collaboratively participate in their research in the field of artistic entrepreneurship.

The frame for SM: “timetable”;

The core research team’s idea was that SM was not defined by a pre-set fixed schedule, but had a flexible frame that would invite ideas to emerge along the way. Therefore, the research team courageously developed an analog management tool called “timetable” as frame for the daily planning of workshops and other activities.

Naturally, I as teacher beforehand had sketched workshop ideas by describing content, number of participants, duration and working space preferences. But on the other hand, I had no idea when, how or if these workshop ideas would be performed.

2

As mentioned, I arrived a week into SM. My first meeting with the “timetable” was interesting and very inspiring. Everyone (students, graduates, educators, researchers, admin, principals etc.) gathered at 5 pm in the hallway of the work space and navigated with utmost naturalness in what I would call a loose yet organized planning session of the next day’s activities. Before the “timetable” session, everyone having workshop or other activities ideas (understood as offers) had made a brief description of content, duration and number of participants. This was briefly presented to everyone. Otherwise, the planning was a fluid negotiation where everyone listened to each other; to needs, to wishes and had a flexible attitude, *eg.* some offers were repeated at the request of the group, other offers were postponed to another day and several were added as evening events.

A very interesting aspect of the “timetable” tool was that it naturally invited everyone (regardless of position) to offer ideas and, at the same time, invited everyone (regardless of position) to participate in the offers. Therefore, as participant, I both offered and participated in workshops, conversation reflection sessions and other activities. On many levels, I think, the “timetable” blurred the border between teacher, researcher, student and admin. As a wonderful colleague from Lisbon said; “I see myself more as a researcher than less as a teacher. We research and learn together”.

Another interesting aspect was that several workshops and reflection sessions emerged as ideas between generations, across nationalities, positions (*eg.* student and teacher) and disciplines in the space in-between. The space in-between described as conversations in the hallway or in the courtyard in breaks, over lunch or dinner etc.

Personally I perceive “timetable” as an entrepreneurial as well as an interdisciplinary tool that has multiple possibilities in theater productions and in education contexts. The “timetable” is a flexible and democratic tool which implicit must tolerate, expect and invite divergent opinions. Therefore, a prerequisite for the “timetable” is not a desire for harmony or

consensus but a desire for diversity that allows participants opinion to be heard but, at the same time, requires participants to listen to each other. The “timetable” might not necessarily meet all personal needs but challenge us to be open-minded towards each other. “Timetable” offers a possibility to become a community with the potential of growing together by learning from each another.

### **Description and reflections on my SM contributions/workshops**

I came to SM with a desire to explore collective and co-creative collaboration formats. Co-creation in design or theater context is a working format that invite consumers or audience to participate, to inform and/or give knowledge to a creative process. At the same time, a co-creative team usually consists of different professions. By referring to co-creation, my idea was to create workshops inviting everyone interested regardless of age, position, nationality etc. to participate in exploring material together in a interdisciplinary workspace. At the same time, I wanted to challenge myself to create workshop frames where I dared not to know everything or aim for specific outcomes.

### **Beforehand I had described the following two workshop offers:**

Sampling material - an exploration in-between responding, reacting and reflecting



This workshop is inspired from the “material-sampling workshop” I invited you to join at the teacher’s seminar, “Expanding Crafts and Disrupting Routines in Time and Space”, Copenhagen in November 2018.

This workshop will invite you to work with and explore potentials in simple and cheap daily life materials (paper, tape and pencils) in a non-hierarchical space. By sampling and circulating material, working on each other's materials and indulging what is happening, we will enter in new dialogues with our self, the material and the others. New working methods and cultural meetings will emerge in a tactile environment.

### **AweAre - exploring being in-between to wear and to be aware**



The center of this workshop is bodily engagement. This workshop is inspired from several artistic research projects on costume. In these projects my curiosity has been to explore how a group of people coming from different disciplines (and therefore enter in a workshop or a workspace with different perspectives) by using their bodies as tool can reflect and develop a common language.

In this workshop I will introduce two multi-person costumes connecting four people. The costumes called AweAre play with a meaning between "to wear" and "to be aware". Wearing and exploring the multi-person costume are dependent on and influenced by the co-wearers. Therefore, the movement is not merely an individual but become a collective bodily experience. The multi-person costume challenges us to dare to explore an idea of a collective body.



In addition, in conversation with a second year Portuguese scenography student Francisco Sampaio, an idea for a costume workshop “In-between making and wearing” arose, which we jointly planned. The inspiration for creating the costume was a Portuguese poem (translated into English by Francisco). The costumes were preferably created directly on the body, mainly with recycled materials, which we found on site. We asked the participants to work in pairs of two; one as “maker” and the other as “wearer” - after which they switched roles. In between the sessions we asked the participants to write a short reflection; as “maker” on the visual and as “wearer” on the sensory aspect of the costume. Which they subsequently shared and reflected upon together.

As a general note in these workshops, I tried, in various ways - though perhaps completely methodical alike - to explore the idea or potential of an interdisciplinary community as a learning space for everyone participating including me as teacher/researcher. A community not defined by participants with specific knowledge/skills, but more defined by participants bringing different knowledge, skills and interests which they offered, shared and contributed with in the common working space.

In the two workshops, described beforehand, I was curious to investigate how materials can produce nonverbal dialogues between people and which dialogues to occurs. I invited the participants (myself included) to work in silence; to listen to the material with their hands and senses - to physicality engage - to enter, what I call, a dialogue with material(s). The material understood, partly as the concrete physical material (a costume or materials as *eg.* paper, tape, plastic) and partly as each other’s actions. Wondering if, we would stay in our own individual investigation or if we would get inspired by actions happening in the space.

A common approach in both workshops was an idea of starting with a shorter warmup session focusing on bodily sensations and/or awareness. One warmup session was an exercise where a sensitive touch guided or lead the movement between two people, the other was sharing a story arising from or in focusing on a body part. The idea of starting the workshop with a warmup was to offer all of us a way of arriving in the space, and hopefully simultaneously building contemplation and trust between us.

At the end of each workshop (including the costume workshop, which did not take place in silence), I asked the participants to reflect upon and share what had happened in the

workshop as group and individual experiences. It was very thought-provoking to me that several people talked about feeling creatively free (from own and outside expectations, for example, "I forgot myself in the creative process"), being playful (eg. "it's a long time since I had so much fun. I realized, I have forgotten how to play."), the engagement with material (e.g. "In the material touch, I sensed my body"), that a creative community emerged across professions, positions, ages and nationalities, and at the same time, a professional space emerged where everyone, regardless of knowledge, contributed. As a teacher/researcher I did set the frame and made my knowledge available in the workshops. At the same time, I tried not to say too much, to give too many directions since I was curious to investigate what happened if I listened to the group. This approach meant, I was not interested in a pre-determined outcome but more interested in exploring what kind of knowledge the group would offer. Several times I was surprised and emotionally touched by what occurred during the workshops between materials and participants. In the "material-sampling" workshop it was mind blowing to me how quickly individual interactions with material inspired others to react on actions and to interact with each other. The material became the link between us that created a nonverbal free and playful dialogue and collaboration.

In the reflection after the "AweAre" workshop it was interesting to hear the reflections on the impact of the two visually quite similar yet sensorially quite different connecting costume. One creating a movement hierarchy between the wearers and the other created a playful interaction between the wearers. At the same time, the wearing experience, made the group reflect upon not only the costumes potential in theater context but also on the potential in the costume for collaborative exercises in broader contexts. Which meant the group in their reflection not only unfold the costumes' narratives potential but also unfolded the costumes' potential as a collaborative tool. These reflections generously offered me, the maker of the costume and initiator of the workshop, new ideas to developing more costume prototypes with other bodily impacts and new ideas of how to use the costumes as a collaborative tool in other settings outside a theater practice/context.

In the "In-between making and wearing" workshop it was exciting to see the ways participants worked. Some created the costume separately, others worked as teams, but everyone still discussed, helped and explored the material together. In the days after the

workshop several participants from different theater positions expressed that they were inspired to use the making and wearing exercise in their own work.

By giving myself the task to listening to the group, I welcomed the unforeseen and unplanned which was surprisingly rewarding. While being actively participating, I was still able to learn from one workshop to the next. For example, in the “In-between making and wearing” workshop, which were held twice, I, in the first edition, shared a shorter written reflection, inspired by the work of dance theorist Rudolf Von Laban, on how to note material/body quality and movement as inspiration. After the workshop I reflected upon how I presented the written reflection, since I realized, that it was not used, either, since it did not make sense to the participants or, since the time was too short. Therefore, I, in the second edition, did not share the Laban reflection. On a more general note this makes me reflect upon how, why and which kind of material and knowledge I share in a workshop. What makes sense in context of a main focus in a workshop? In the “In-between making and wearing” workshop, I realized, the main focus was to explore how we as group within a short timeframe could produce rapid and improvised costume prototypes. In a frame of longer temporal workshop *eg.* over two days, the reflection exercise asking participants to write and share experiences of being maker and wearer, the Laban written reflection potentially could inspire and encourage participants to develop and tell narrative- and material stories which then could lead to a development of a next version of a costume prototype. Moreover, in this context, the physical material and the text material hopefully would become material of equal importance as material for a dialogue in a creative process.

As a short conclusion, I in the workshop gained new knowledge and were offered new ideas both as teacher, as artist and as research. Moreover, I find, that the active participating position has great potential as research method.

### **Participating in workshops**

As mentioned earlier I participated in several workshops, conversations and other activities organized by colleagues. I refer to everyone as colleagues. I do not want to differentiate between the position of being *eg.* student or teacher, since everyone generously shared methods, knowledge and reflections.

I won't mention everything I participated in but choose some examples to reflect upon - to explore which kind of knowledge and inspiration I gained as participant.

In a workshop Paolo Nikli "Mask" made an introduction to the mask from his practice with Commedia dell'arte masks, Balinese traditional masks and Jacques Lecoq neutral masks.

Paolo shortly introduced the different mask traditions and unfolded the idea of a secret hidden in every mask. The secret as memory of tradition and representation but also formed by the memory of past wearers (sweet tears etc) but mainly a secret as a path for the performer to try to understand it and keep it. The secret as an empty space between the mask and the performer's face.

As an introduction to wearing the masks, Paolo presented a ritual describing how we bodily should approach and put on the mask. The ritual called for focus and respect, as a preparation for us, the wearers, to explore and become transformed by the secret power of the mask. The ritual offered a transition from one state to another.

As a costume researcher the mask "dressing" ritual is extremely inspiring. The ritual offers reflections on and questions to costume dressing situations. *Eg.* reflections on situations before a performance, between a dresser and a performer: Is the costume-dressing a practical necessity in situations with large scale costumes - or is dressing a ritual that is consciously staged that therefore articulates a transition for the performer? Moreover, I wonder, what if the idea of a ritual was introduced in some fitting-room situations? The fitting-room situation often focuses on functional and visual aspects of costume. In the fitting room performer, designer, tailor and others discuss the costume fit as the impact of a costume *eg.* function, movement and what the character looks like. What happens if we in education in some fitting-room situations articulate the costumes as a possibility for transition by consciously introducing and developing dressing rituals? By inventing, developing and exploring a costume-fitting dressing ritual, I would be interested to research, which discussions will appear, which reflections will arise and which knowledge will *eg.* a costume and an actor student gain? Playing with the idea of staging a dressing-ritual, which kind of inspiration will I, as costume designer or/and researcher, gain? Could the idea of a costume dressing ritual be valuable in a design process?

In the first week of SM a group of colleagues started to develop a Theater Manifesto.

When I arrived they several times invited everyone to participate to discuss, share and



reflect with them. I participated in one of these sessions. It was interesting to explore how the group generously shared their Manifesto-sketch as fluid shifts between telling personal stories and experiences (arising from different countries, education systems, traditions and different professional positions) and sharing the general topics they found. Entering their workspace I was invited to explore both their individual and regional challenges, and to discover their common core values defined as core topics. Methodically the listening seemed as the essential tool for the group to define common values. It is thought-provoking that even though the group unfolded the topics by telling personal stories, the topics clearly appeared much more as intercultural and interdisciplinary statements than as different personal opinions.

I was intuitively influenced by their method (the fluid shifts between personal stories and common topics) and therefore I allowed myself to reflect on their Manifesto-sketch from personal reflections on the topics not as truths or judgements but as ways of asking questions to the topics.

As a note, I like to mention, that at dinner on the last day of SM the group presented a first draft and it is exciting to learn that the group has continued to develop the Manifesto after SM.

Workshops led by David Antunes “Arguing on the chain gang” and Laura Jakschas’ “I love...” were somehow very different yet, at the same time, offered me knowledge on conversation and reflecting methods. David challenged our conversation skills to become philosophical reflections. Laura challenged us in different ways to formulate individual and common values, to give advice to others and to share something we love.

As teacher their workshops somehow enrolls in an ongoing conversation with my colleague Rikke Lund Heinsen on pedagogical views and approaches. Simultaneously the workshops question my position, values and approach but also offers me new methods and therefore several more conversation frames/tools/standpoints. The workshops offer me awareness, choices and asks me to be playful and daring. It is important, as teacher, to give answers as a kind of truth or wisdom or do I offer a frame for student to develop their artistic voice and recognize their values? As teacher, am I convinced that skills must be taught based on one specific method? Do I, as teacher, search for a specific outcome? Do I offer an open frame that invites students to work in and grow in ways I, as teacher, did

not expect? Do I invite students to explore workspaces that might differ from and challenge traditions - as hierarchical traditions and positions in education and in the theater business? Am I, as teacher, a judge of taste or a shepherd that guides by asking questions? Am I, as teacher, preoccupied in the process of learning and developing together with students?

### **The space in-between**

Another aspect interesting of SM was the space in-between. In-between as all the time between workshops; time to talk and share in the hallway, in the courtyard, eating together etc. These conversations often started as sharing what we did in different workshops. The sharing was a window into what someone else explored, experienced and realized in a workshop. On one level, it was as sharing knowledge from one workshop to another, on another level the sharing felt like reflection in a broader scale on the theme or the field of artistic entrepreneurship.

One example: In a break Joao Miguel shared a workshop idea on "The failing voice" with me. I should mention, that I did not participate in Joao's workshop even though several sessions were offered. But in between the sessions we (Joao and I) kept reflecting on the difference between embracing failure and refining skills. In education it seems as if we only are preoccupied of developing and refining certain skills *eg.* the actors voice but rarely we talk about or work directly with *eg.* the failing voice, our imperfection or the failure as a potential for development. We might say it is ok to fail, but I wonder, if we acutely focus enough on the knowledge we gain from the failure or the imperfection. Which discoveries are there in the imperfection and the failure? I wonder, if focusing mainly on

perfecting skills, at the same time and indirectly, we are inviting insecurity to arise. Insecurity as a

judgment mainly in our own eyes of not being perfect; as if suddenly will be obvious to everyone that "I have no talent". I believe, that insecurity is a part of a creative process and is a feeling we, as artists but also as humans, have in common and therefore is something we in education need to address. Maybe the feeling of insecurity is linked to knowledge of being imperfect. One reflection is that the insecurity is longing for perfection and gaining skills, as the ability to do or accomplish something well. But what if we also define skills as the knowledge gained through experience - as a theoretical or practical understanding of a subject? What if we asked ourselves when we become insecure: "which kind of

knowledge do I long for? Which skills do I want to develop and which knowledge do I need to gain?”. At the same time, what happens if we dare to fail? What if we see failure as an opportunity to explore new aspects in a research process? What if, we redefine failure as the knowledge we gain in experiments, which might not turn out as expected, which can lead to the next or several more new experiments. Perceiving failure as a potential for new knowledge and reflections, the failure can be an extremely valuable driving force in research and in a learning or developing process. What if we, in education, openly welcome, share and articulate insecurity, imperfection and failure? These reflections make me wonder, if we want develop skills, we, at the same time, need to welcome the failing voice and the imperfection and give them a more equal voice in education?

Another example: SM was characterized by the sound of many different languages and by an ever-changing shift of languages in-between us. This frame indirectly invited everyone to explore how to interact or position oneself in a group speaking an unfamiliar language. Simultaneously, the frame asked us if we as group we’re inclusive if we spoke a language that one in the group did not understand. To reflect upon; what is to include or to exclude? Moreover, being in this intercultural environment challenged many us to step out of the comfort zone of a mother tongue into a second language depriving us from linguistic nuances. On top of this, even speaking the same language, we often used different vocabulary considering a certain generation or a certain professional position.

Somehow and in spite of these linguistic challenges we became a community. Therefore, the question is how much or how little common language and vocabulary a group needs to become a community? Can diversity of vocabulary in language become a strength in a community? Strength understood the linguistic diversity can help me, as participant, or pushes me to dare to try to formulate thoughts and reflections even though feeling lack of vocabulary. At the same time, the diversity asks me to listen in the most possible ways. Asking if I can listen by looking at facial expression, by exploring body language and if listening also can be asking questions in an attempt to understand and in a search to unfold and to help linguistic nuances to emerge in-between us?

### **General reflections on an international interdisciplinary workspace**

An important lesson, I bring with me from SM, is that it is essential and important to

collaborate in interdisciplinary international workspaces both in research contexts but also in developing national educational systems. Daring to be curious and open minded towards the Other - other mindsets, other traditions, other cultures, other generations, other disciplines - challenges my (often unconscious) habitual habits. The Other provokes, pushes and questions my habits and self-sufficiency. Entering a workspace with the Other offers a mirror where I either point at him/her, or explore what I can learn with him/her. I must continuously ask myself if I am truly interested in building a community or if am I caught up in prejudice and my own expectations? Do I listen?

For me, entering an interdisciplinary international workspace offers an opportunity to explore what happens between us; It offers to us to explore how do you and me become us - become a WE? In the WE, I can examine (and challenge) my mindset and my contribution to the community and simultaneously discover the knowledge the community offers not only to me but to all of us. Knowing that the offers and knowledge we gain in the community might be different depending on who we are, maybe it is in the knowledge of our diversity that WE become an open-minded and strong community?

For me, it is interesting to reflect on how we as Danes can contribute to an international community. On the one hand, my hope is that we contribute with an educational tradition where we expect and inspire courageous action. We dare to act which can inspire others to dare to do the same. On the other hand, we sometimes get caught up in ourselves, in wanting or expecting our voices to be heard in a special way, in an "I am used to", in our own needs and expectations. Maybe an outcome of a danish political situation where young people are forced to and rewarded for passing through the education system as soon as possible. A political situation that for years has focused on national measurement, management, reporting systems within the education sector with the impact that demands and claims have been paramount. Therefore, I wonder if we subconsciously are less interested in or perhaps trained in LISTENING to what arises between us. In listening, I may discover what I can learn about myself and, moreover, learn from and about interactions in a community.

At SM I have experienced a generous interdisciplinary international community. A generous community across nationalities, professions, positions and generations supporting and developing ideas together, inviting each other to participate in workspaces,

challenging each other's mindsets, sharing knowledge and experiences. Participating in international interdisciplinary contexts seems essential and a valuable frame to generate knowledge on how we can create free open workspaces. Spaces for curiosity and exchange. I believe these open spaces are necessary if we want the development of our education systems we continuously need to dare to challenge methods and traditions. Moreover, I also believe, that the open curious workspaces hold a potential for renewal of the theater practice.

### **The personal and professional impact of SM**

As teacher, I ask myself how can we engage and learn from each other, how do we share knowledge and get inspired by what others can offer? In theater education systems, I wonder, what skills we need to learn as artists? What is defined as the most important knowledge; which tools, skills, methods? Is developing and gaining knowledge through a collaborative workspace important? Is developing collaborative workspaces a method, a skill, a pedagogical approach, an important research area?

Is it only in shorter workshops, or whatever we call them, we dare to go into the unknown to explore collaborative processes in new unexpected ways? Can I in a theater production find an openness where my knowledge about costumes is both a source of curiosity for others and opportunity for gaining new knowledge from them? Can the collective mindset, whatever that might be, guide a process? Will listening to my collaborators invite them into the core of my reflections and can my insecurity surprise me to go in new directions?

If we want to change or explore ways of collaborating, where do we start? In the education system or in theater productions? Does change come from battling systems/hierarchies or by changing our own approach? Will changing my approach have an impact? If I change my own approach, is a system which I often find defined by hierarchies (education or theaters) give me the space in a curriculum or a production to explore and develop new ways of collaborating?

If I feel alone in a system based on certain values, traditions and hierarchies, which I, the older I become, often question, where do I find the energy and courage to keep on trying to change, develop and questioning? If there seems to be no space or interest to develop

together? If I feel there are so many potentials in exploring variations of collaborating, if I long to share and explore together with students, colleagues and collaborators, who will challenge my ideas, where do I go? Who wants to play?

I feel so privileged to be invited to join the SM project - to develop The School of Tomorrow. In such short time I have gained so much inspiration and new knowledge in conversations, by participating in workshops and in feedback (verbal or non verbal) on the ideas I shared in workshops. I have been offered a valuable opportunity to explore, develop and learn, not alone but together. For me it is a boost of energy which gives hope and belief in the WE as potential. A belief that a WE, which is curious and open-minded, can active something together (in education and in theater production) maybe beyond my dreams.

I go home with a gift of knowledge about the potential in communities and collective processes. Together with others have I explored how material (in wearing, in making, in sampling together) can be a collective way of communicating, playing and developing together even without words. I see a potential which has given me the desire and courage to keep trying, exploring and developing. Participating confirms my belief in that everything is possible, if I and WE keep on trying, pushing and developing in all possible ways.

SM shown me the importance of having a diverse international network of collaborators. Different backgrounds and references, different ages, different knowledge offers me perspective. A perspective that makes me look at myself - it makes me question my believes and open my mind, it awakens my curiosity. SM made me aware that I am more a researcher longing to keep on learning that a teacher teaching a specific course. SM has defined as my core value curiosity. SM have made me realize that core in research is to invite collaborators and to trust that the WE will offer new exiting knowledge.

I am humble and grateful. My hope is that The School of Tomorrow developed by the core research team together with all participants, CAN and MUST continue. A School of Tomorrow that might be without a "traditional" education curriculum but will and must be a school preoccupied in research as a continuous process. An ever changing school developing and expanding workspaces.

What if?

What if, I dare?

What if, I dare to open my mind?

What if, I dare to open my mind to explore?

What if, I dare to open my mind to explore, I wonder  
what I will learn?

What if, we dare?

What if, we dare to open our minds?

What if, we dare to open our minds to explore?

What if, we dare open our minds to explore together, I wonder  
what can we learn - what will we find?

What if, we dare open our minds and keep exploring together, I wonder  
what will arise in the haze of tomorrow?

With gratitude.