# Communication in relations within higher education

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Abstract

*In this study, we problematize the work with personal and professional development in higher education, in terms of processes of change and learning. The aim of the study is to present a philosophical and theoretical framework around the notion “play”, which we mean can contribute to enabling communication in relation within the frames of higher education. We start with presenting the notion “play” from within a philosophical and theoretical perspective and put it in relation to ethics, communication, liberation and knowledge capturing. Thereafter we present Expressive Arts (EXA) as a method and a tool for working with this framework pedagogically. We discuss the spatial aspects and consequences that follows from putting this framework into practice and give an example on how this has been done in the course Personal and Professional Development (PPD) in the social workers program on Mälardalen University. The study’s contribution to higher education is to clarify the importance of creating spatial condition on the university for play in its whole complexity, i.e. for communication in relation between students as active subjects in a process of change for the coming profession.*

*Key words: Communication in relation, Expressive Arts, Higher education, Intermodal forms of learning, Intersubjectivity, Play.*

## **Changes within universities**

Higher education as an area of knowledge and a research field deals with issues relating to education, teaching and adults’ learning.**[[1]](#footnote-1)** The object of knowledge for higher education is change and learning processes, and how different conditions for teaching and learning are translated into theory and practice. According to a report from The Swedish National Union of Students (2015) university teaching staff often lack an interest in – and knowledge of – higher education, which many students find frustrating as their teachers’ competence does not correspond with the students’ demands for what is seen to be good education. The number of students from homes without a tradition of studying has increased. The higher education competence of teaching staff at universities and university colleges therefore needs to be strengthened in order to meet students’ needs and to offer them a good education, which means that pedagogical innovation should be encouraged.

Pedagogical skill is assumed to result from teaching staff developing a research-based approach to their own teaching, which they document and share both with their immediate colleagues and in public contexts (articles, training days, conferences, etc.). This contributes towards a common culture for development. In order for this to work, there must be structures at the educational institution to support this development work, as well as arenas in which to present it (cf. Swedish National Agency of Higher Education report 2006:54 R). Several players[[2]](#footnote-2) within the field now monitor how the work to strengthen higher education is carried out at Sweden’s educational institutions.

### A changed teaching role

The Swedish National Union of Students (SFS) (2015) gives its combined, overall view of pedagogical development among university teaching staff. Two opinions are emphasised: that the demands placed by educational institutions on higher education training are low, and that teaching staff have a lack of pedagogical knowledge which risks leading to students receiving a poorer quality education. SFS states, supported by the findings of a survey, that students rank pedagogical matters as the most important quality factor of all. According to SFS (2013), student-active learning forms have broad support in pedagogical research and theory formulation in which ways of working and studying that focus on surface learning and in-depth learning are put forward against each other. SFS calls for a view of teaching in which students’ own activities and motivation are central to the planning and implementation of teaching.

**The aim of the study**

In response to the challenges currently faced by teaching at university level, we propose that higher education research should also focus on the philosophical and theoretical frameworks that take the concept of ‘play’ as their starting point, in combination with Expressive Arts Therapy (EXA). The article emanates from extensive experience of working with EXA as a pedagogical tool and a method. We believe that this experience is relevant to the various vocational programmes in which the professional role places requirements on communication and a supporting intersubjective relationship when interacting with others. The aim of this article is to show how we, with support from theoretical philosophy in combination with EXA, can create pedagogical spaces that correspond better to a demanding professional role in which intersubjectivity plays a central role. With a few examples from Expressive Arts we intend to show how communication in relation can influence the pedagogical space within higher education.

## **Play between transcendent philosophy and modality**

We live enclosed in relationships through which we come into existence. Communication through combined languages, including non-verbal modalities of communication, is a medium for this process. We use these combined languages to construct, organise and create meaning in what becomes our narratives. Play offers “communication in relation” through several languages other than simply verbal language (Apelmo 2008, p. 27). Play as a field in the literature reflects the double condition of being human, existing as a subject that is dependent on encounters with others in order to see one’s own relevance. Play forms, instructs and develops (Knutsdotter Olovsson 1998). This is in the sense that the individual learns to perceive himself as an acting subject, as a practitioner, as a social being and as a citizen. By its very nature, play is a form of expression that in itself offers freedom and realisation for those who take part in it. In play, it is always possible to start again, and to try anew (Knutsdotter Olovsson 1998, Winnicott 1971/1981, Røed Hansen 1991, Soltvedt 2005).

### The ethics in the encounter between subjects

Levinas suggests that ethics is something concrete that emerges within the interaction between people. This implies that ethics precedes understanding and ideas in relation to what is good, and that ethics therefore always arises in the contact between subjects (Todd 2003). Ethics is seen as a fundamental approach, which appeals to us to allow ourselves to be transformed in the encounter between people.

Levinas differentiates between the concepts of totality and eternity. Within the concept of totality, others[[3]](#footnote-3) are integrated to become the same. Within the concept of eternity, distance is maintained between others and the same. According to Levinas, the concept of totality is theoretical, while the concept of eternity is moral (Levinas 1969/1999). Through the concept of eternity, which arises in relation to the other, the individual cannot combine itself and others into a totality. If the other is reduced to fit our perception and our description, we have in practice already broken the contact since the description of the other intends to capture the other in its own world.

A new subjectivity arises through the responsibility for the other. The actual significance of being a social being is to exist for others. The significance of me seeing myself as special in relation to the other – to the Other or the others – as an important ability to respond to the other also means that I can appear as a subject for the Other. If the responsibility for the Other is dependent on us being captured in each other’s worlds, but also on us being able to choose to go beyond their attributes, the fundamental response in our attitude must be *for* the interpersonal relationship (i.e. it must make the face-to-face meeting possible) (ibid.). The meeting with the face of the other is the concrete relationship. In this openness, an ethical responsibility is potentially made visible which we can hope will also become visible to the other. According to Levinas, this act of going beyond cannot be totalised. It is thus in the attitude towards the Other that we find the radical value of humanisation and the justification for daring to hope and acknowledge our need for each other, which becomes clear in our desire for contact with each other.

### Communication in the moment

How can we create contexts that make change possible? The ‘current moment’ is, according to Stern, the intentions and the action that aim to live, examine and adapt the intersubjective orientation, and in this to experience something new, something that breaks boundaries. *Kairos* is the Greek term for ‘the moment’, i.e. the everyday human experience of a *now* that suspends *chronos*. The current moment is the moment of *kairos*, and is perceived as a forestalling ‘power’ that mobilises behaviour (Stern 2004/2005). We need to ask ourselves: *How can we create contexts that make the current moment possible and, as a consequence, create the right conditions for change?* “How can we pry open *chronos* to create a *now* that is long enough to include space for *kairos*?” (ibid., p. 26.)

*Chronos* is the economised view of time that is used within science, and that in many ways characterises our everyday existence. In the world of *chronos*, the current moment is a point that only moves in time in a direction towards a future. When it moves, it eats up the future and leaves the past behind it. Here, there is not actually any now. The narrative tames *chronos*, the narrative makes the path of time seem familiar, narratives create a sense of context and continuity in life, the narrative thus makes the path of time bearable. Narratives can reproduce but not tame the current moment, *kairos.*

In *kairos*, events converge in a now – in a moment. *Kairos* emerges from “communication in relation”. Here, moments are created from opportunities. We see and understand from new perspectives. The experience and the insight of this requires action or creates a situation that encourages action. And even if we do not grasp the opportunity that arises, this is a standpoint that in itself changes our lives, even if it is a different type of change. In *kairos*, moments of different sizes – moments of life, of lived experience – are captured beyond the words. The words can only recreate it afterwards.

In a pedagogical context, such an aspiration towards the *now* of the moment also creates a constant aspiration towards change. This aspiration subjectifies us in that we try to find our way towards change action, and in that it shows the changeability of society and of the world around us. To the extent that we talk about pedagogics for subjects – intersubjective pedagogics – it is of central importance that the participant is given the opportunity to actually enter the subjectivity, which requires us to create space for *Kairos*.

We cannot make others subjects – the person in question must enter this subjectivity – but what we can do is to give them the right tools and conditions for this.

### Play and liberation

The transcendence of play can be found in going beyond the direct experience of the situation and the social context, one subject encountering another, and in communication – both the verbal exchange and all the other non-verbal forms of communication(see Knutsdotter Olovsson 1998, Winnicott 1971/1981).

Play, and thereby intersubjective encounters, assumes an effort to learn from the Other rather than to learn about the Other. Learning from the Other emphasises a mutual responsibility in the parties that come together (Todd 2003). The ability to relate in this way does not primarily require knowledge about the Other, but rather susceptibility, sensitivity and openness towards the Other. Above all else, this openness towards a possible altering and unpredictable moment of attentiveness towards the Other signals a responsibility for the Other. If both parties have the same desire, this means a mutual responsibility. Confidence and trust in and towards the social space are fundamental requirements for play (Winnicott 1971/1981). Reciprocity requires this form of openness (Todd 2003). “Meaning-bearing reciprocity” (Apelmo 2009, p. 51) emerges from this openness.

Buber (1923/1994) explicitly warns against the objectification of people and the formalisation of interpersonal relationships. It is certainly possible to live there; in the past, in a world of ideas, in a world of getting to know in order to use, to make use of. However, those who only live there are no longer people. All the readily available answers, all the readily available forms, manuals and set structures bind the person to ‘the world’. Freire believes that the task and the challenge for each individual consist of a persistent aspiration towards a liberation from oppression and limiting structures. For those who experience oppression in one form or another, it is a matter of freeing themselves *and* their oppressors, of clarifying structures that restrict, prevent and sometimes suppress with violence, in favour of structures that lead towards people’s humanisation (Freire 1970/1979).

### Play as knowledge capture

Knutsdotter Olovsson (1998), just like Winnicott, pays attention to the societal factors that lead to people losing the ability to play, access to their creativity and thus confidence in themselves and their opportunities. Teaching plays a crucial role in how we relate to other and the world we live in. What Freire (1970/1979) refers to as ‘banking teaching’ requires a division between the person and the world; the person is only *in* the world, not *with* the world or with others; the person is a spectator and not a creator. The person is a recipient of knowledge, not of actual knowing. Unfortunately, many of those who embrace the cause of freedom are surrounded and influenced by the climate that creates the ‘banking’ approach, and often fail to see its underlying content or dehumanising effect, and they therefore believe that radical change involves a distribution of resources. Paradoxically, they use banking teaching in what they regard as an effort to liberate (ibid.).

In subjectifying teaching, people develop their ability to understand critically the way in which they exist in the world with which, and in which, they find themselves: they learn to see the world not as a static reality but as a reality in a process, in change. The starting point is always the person in the ‘here and now’, which constitutes the situation and the context in which the person is familiar, from which he improves himself, and in which he intervenes. It is only by starting out from this situation – which determines his perception of it – that he can start to move. People have a cross-border ability, an ability to see and analyse their lives in a quest for change. Change is possible in practice where action and reflection come together as one (ibid.).

Teaching as the practice of freedom – as opposed to teaching as the practice of dominance – denies that the person is abstract, isolated, independent and not linked to the world. Knowledge emerges and is captured, only through invention and re-invention, through the constant, impatient, continuous, hopeful investigation that people carry out in the world and together with others. Teaching is based on creativity and stimulates reflection on and action with reality, and thus corresponds to people’s calling as beings who are only real when they are active in investigations and creating change.

## **Space for play through Expressive Arts Therapy as a philosophy and a practice**

Expressive Arts Therapy (EXA)[[4]](#footnote-4) is a tool which, through various artistic forms of expression, is based on and stimulates play while at the same time also developing capacity for play.[[5]](#footnote-5) EXA is an intermodal approach, i.e. an approach within transitions between different artistic forms of expression, through which participants’ communication includes not only verbal language but also expressive, aesthetic forms of expression. The insight that the person involved in a creative process, in the search for forms of expression, is involved in his entirety with all his sense and all his emotion, is central.

In EXA, play is expressed through outlets such as the body/movement, images/sculpture, poetry/myths and tales, drama/production and discussion and joint action.[[6]](#footnote-6) Joint action should be understood as an expression of what emerges when thought and action are combined in a mutual meaning-bearing exchange between involved parties. One common factor is that the participants, including the process leader,[[7]](#footnote-7) express themselves in and through the various languages. Here, the participant simultaneously encounters himself and others. It is important to point out that there are no rules for how the various languages are expressed, other than an ambition for ‘sincerity and honesty’ and that no one should be harmed.

An artistic expression – a symbol – says something over and above what is captured with traditional verbal methods. In its practical application, EXA – with its intermodality – offers an opportunity to adapt work to the participant, the individual or the group to which the work relates. This work can be based on the ‘language’, the form of expression and the sensory modality that the participant himself chooses to work through, before being broadened to include additional languages. Participants act by expressing themselves, primarily through the various artistic languages at their disposal, but also through discussion and joint action.

In the work carried out within and through EXA, a distinction is made between processes and the products created in the form of images, texts, drama, music, etc. The process is at the centre of the interest. However, the product is not insignificant. It constitutes a documentation of the process and a catalyst for further exploration and knowing. This form of work and context can be described metaphorically as a stage that has been arranged for narrative in and through all the different languages available, and for listening and for “communication in relation”. A stage is established whereby participants become visible and are seen in a particular way, and where EXA offers tools for communication and sharing in and through play. The work is based on the participant’s life experience from a holistic perspective of awareness and consciousness (Stern 2004/2005). The aim of the work is that the participant should gain a clearer experience and understanding of himself and his context, and of the themes or the task at hand. Participants also develop their competence to deal with and encounter private and societal contexts in their everyday lives in various ways; to proceed in practice in changed action based on the theme or the challenge that has come to the fore. The work requires an openness to the encounter between the participants and a preparedness to enter that which feels new and challenging, and creates pleasure and joy, but also causes concern. The work involves processes in which what has previously been taken for granted is deconstructed before subsequently becoming reconstructive or reparative. Participants face challenges of differing types in relation to the openness that arise. With openness comes vulnerability. The fragility of existence is shown, together with the possibilities, the power and the resources – as well as the potential for change – that also emerge from openness. Questioning and sharing life experiences helps participants to approach breadth and depth in and of their own experience, as it emerges in the encounters between participants and with the artistic expressions. This depth of existential character is always present, even if at first sight the participant only seems to relate to what happens at the surface level.

The objectives and results of the process work are sought in joint action between the parties. The artistic expressions have a supporting and bearing – and an opening and focusing – function and significance. There is an emotionally communicative flow between the person who leads and invites participants to take part in work and those who choose to participate. In the work with EXA, phenomena are sought and created as part of the communication that takes place, with the intention of also actively entering into encounters with and trying out these phenomena. Participants, as active subjects, try out and seek clarity and context in what sometimes appears to be unclear and confusing, and which also sometimes emerges with a background in a sphere of culture other than the participant’s own sphere of culture. The difficulties associated with seeking clarity in relation to various types of phenomenon take on different appearances: My experiences of your experiences become our experiences, which become my own experiences again. Interpretation occurs based on the conditions provided by the context. The process leader is encouraged – together with the participants – to seek an understanding and an interpretation of the phenomena that appear. The role of the process leader is based on meaning-bearing reciprocity and presence in the encounter with participants. The work involves a disassociation from a traditional ‘expert role’ in which the process leader interprets the participants’ materials. Instead, confidence in each participant’s opportunity and ability to arrive at insights – both through their own inherent resources in and through creation, and through being in harmony with the creative process in encounters with others – is recommended.

Through an effort to approach the fundamental experiences of life, the traditional division between thought and body, between the explicit and the implicit, is avoided. The division into body and soul is a central example of the dualism that is unable to embrace the person as a whole. Being faithful to the body as a subject is to try to reduce the objectification of the body as far as possible.[[8]](#footnote-8) The opposite of this is an attempt to reduce the body to certain functions linked to specific properties. In this way of viewing knowledge, the theory has been prioritised over a holistic way of looking at consciousness – at the expense of practice, the work of the hand and the body. In the phenomenological tradition, it is Merleau-Ponty (1945/1997) who puts the body at the centre of the work involved in understanding the person’s existential conditions for interpretation. Reason does not give any absolute knowledge. Without words, understanding is achieved through perceptions, through observation and sensations. A bodily consciousness emerges. The body becomes a medium through which the person can relate to his surroundings – surroundings that the body is simultaneously part of. The body is not only seen, heard and understood – the body sees, hears and understands. The body thus becomes recognised and also subjectified through being enclosed in – and through connections that emanate from – a communicative relational bearing.

### Interpretation and meaning

In EXA, one of the objectives is that participants should – together with each other and in the encounter with the process leader – seek interpretations and an understanding of phenomena which, in turn, are often borne forth in the form of interpretations and understanding. The process leader and the participants encounter a phenomenon on the basis of a pre-understanding. An image or a text that initially appears to be incomprehensible is always incomprehensible against the background that we all bring with us in different ways in work where we seek understanding. An interpretation is an attempt to create clarity and give meaning to phenomena that, on the surface, appear to be unclear, chaotic, incomprehensible, self-contradictory, and so on. It is a way to seek underlying meaning and to put this meaning into a context where that which was unclear is given greater clarity. An interpretation process requires the person who gets involved in the process to perceive it as a meaningful occupation. It is also a matter of distinguishing between meaning and expression. Interpreting involves seeking meaning with the help of new expressions.

**The role of verbal language**

Verbal language and its development occupy a special position in our culture. Verbal language bears forth and conveys narratives in incredible richness. However, verbal language can also appear to be a straitjacket: What we understand is based on what we already know, and what we know comes from what we are able to understand. The literal reality is what we refer to in everyday language as reality. It involves the ‘everyday’ or the ‘real’ – what we often regard as objective. We often take this for granted. However, that which is objective can only exist within the framework of a linguistic, verbal and cognitive context. A reality is made objective by those who are affected by it, and this occurs through the discussion between those who are affected. The objective can thus only exist within the framework of a linguistic construct. Communication – the encounter between subjects – is both facilitated and limited through language as a medium for communication. The object is made intelligible through the language, but the more linguistically and/or rationally distanced the subject becomes from the lived experience, the more unfamiliar the immediate sensations – and the reactions these cause – become in the self and in others. In some sense, the artistic forms of expression and the joint action in and through EXA do away with what we take for granted. We discover ourselves and each other. In the communicative relationship that is established, space is created for new linguistic connections (Knill et al. 1993), and another – different – narrative is formulated, which naturally also includes words.

**Communication and intersubjectivity**

Encounters between people are constituted bodily and verbally, as well as through artistic language in an exchange. People create their history and their context through communicating. Communication using different languages (including non-verbal language) may involve short episodes, a fragment of a life experience, as well as the broad strokes and the perspectives of a person’s life. Work in and through EXA underlines this fact in a particular way. Narratives, in the broad sense of the word– as they are formed – emerge in and through process-oriented work. People constantly seek narrative forms, in words as well as in action. This can originate from an idea or an impulse, before taking on a clearer form. This happens more or less consciously. The artistic forms of expression provide the opportunity to try out different narrative forms. At the same time, feelings and experiences are also investigated. In an initial step, this might involve understanding that narrative actually takes place all the time. A second step may involve playing with and feeling pleasure in creation, with a third step involving observing more consciously what that which is created expresses. It is only after this that a more conscious narrative emerges through different forms of expression. When the insight grows regarding the power and the possibility of narrative through artistic forms of expression, a search for narratives begins: both one’s own narratives and those of others, as well as narratives of all sizes. Through the artistic forms of expression, lived experience – a bodily anchored consciousness – emerges. Implicit experience – this bodily anchored consciousness – is combined with explicit experience and explicit knowledge. The encounter with other participants provides an opportunity to position one’s own narrative in relation to those of others.All other aspects give impulses for continued work.

We regard intersubjectivity as a fundamentally innate involvement (Stern 2004/2005). People want to share thoughts, experiences and feelings. This longing for intersubjectivity is sometimes combined with fears, depending on previous experiences of relationships. Fears and conventions inhibit and paralyse. Intersubjectivity is a driving force in all contexts. A feeling for morals and taking responsibility develops in and through intersubjective interaction, and this in turn strengthens a group and its solidarity. Intersubjectivity thus becomes a fundamental motivation system that is essential for people’s development. This is where ethics arise in relation to the Other (Todd 2003).

**Personal and Professional Development – an example**

Since about 10 years, the pedagogical framework that is proposed here has been applied in Mälardalen University, in the encounter with social worker students within the course Personal and Professional Development (PPD). The part of PPD that we have and still are a part of contains three lectures and three laboratories. The laboratories each covers a full day. The work is followed by a summation.

The first lecture focused on research on play as well as Freire’s “pedagogy for liberation” and a professional way of working. The second lecture focuses on Buber’s “I and Thou” (1923/1994) as well as a phenomenological approach. The third and concluding lecture focuses on the ethics of the encounter between human beings, in accordance with Levinas.

The laboratories’ aim is that the philosophy and the theories that is presented in the lectures shall be concretized and take form during the laboratories. This is meant to encourage a critical approach to how you as a student reflect on your collected life experience and how this experience shapes and affects you in your profession. The material on which the laboratories are based is the students’ life experiences in the shape and width that the respective student wishes to share with others.

The work uses expressive aesthetic modalities that partly are brought from outside in the form of poems and music, and partly brought from within the students’ own activity in the form of movements and paintings. Discussions and sharing of experiences in the encounter between students, in small constellations of mainly two persons, but also in a large group where everyone present is speaking is an important foundation of the laboratories. The ambition is to connect the course literature to the students’ life experiences in a way that strengthens a professional approach.

The laboratory work creates opportunities for learning “inside-out”, a learning that has its starting point in the participants’ life experiences and connects these to theory and philosophy. Content-wise the laboratories orbits around the same themes as the lectures. In the process-oriented work the students are encouraged to continuously reflect around four levels: (1) the personal, (2) the group process in that which is actually happening, (3) theoretical and philosophical anchoring and (4) consequences for the students’ coming profession.

**Discussion**

**A challenge for higher education**

Universities face great challenges in those areas where teaching aims to prepare students for work where the professional role involves active encounters with others (such as care work, social work, pedagogical work, etc.). This applies to practice-oriented professional areas where a theoretical and philosophical anchoring should go hand-in-hand with an awareness of the role and significance of bodily anchored knowledge. The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education has addressed the issue of the necessity of supporting students’ development in relation to aptitude. This applies to all those education contexts where the students themselves will be the most important resource in a future professional role. The Agency has therefore imposed requirements on a graded course element called personal and professional development (Östlund 2012).

When meeting social work students in our teaching work, we have seen that implicit bodily anchored experience needs to be made visible, since it has powerful significance in terms of the individual’s way of dealing with others in the shaping of a future professional role.[[9]](#footnote-9) Our ambition has also been to ‘personify’ the theory and the philosophy that students study in order to make the theory more accessible and comprehensible, and thereby to end the opposition between thought and body, and between implicit and explicit knowledge. When we have spoken about our own experiences as students, professionals, educators and supervisors, we have seen clear examples of how an unconsciousness of bodily anchored knowledge, implicit knowledge, sometimes limits professionals in their professional practice. In some cases, we see examples of treatment that does not correlate with what higher education teaches in the form of vocational preparatory theory and philosophy. We believe that this confirms what Stern showed, namely that implicit knowledge is often broader and more complex than explicit knowledge, which results in implicit knowledge having greater significance for the professional role than explicit knowledge. If implicit knowledge is unreflected, this can sometimes have devastating consequences in the classroom, in care and in social work in a broad sense.

**A higher education transformative focus**

In our article, we have theoretically and philosophically laid the foundation for a transformative pedagogical initiative in which EXA is a central tool. Overall, this initiative corresponds to the challenges described above. Working in and through EXA releases the participant (here, the university student) from one-sided confidence in explicit knowledge, in other words in a traditional concept of knowledge. EXA also calls for implicit knowledge, the bodily anchored lived narrative, bodily anchored knowledge. In the creative work, within the encounter between implicit and explicit knowledge and knowing, space appears for change.

In a future praxis-oriented professional life, thought and action become a cohesive whole. Professional behaviour in the workplace needs to correspond to Levinas’ philosophy of totality and eternity and to Buber’s theory that the ‘I’ in an encounter with another ‘I’ must always relate to an ‘it’ aspect (formalities, legislation, regulations, etc.) and a necessary ‘you’ aspect (presence, love, compassion, instruction, etc.). We believe that there needs to be a conscious higher education approach in which the division between thought and body is ended. We believe that implicit knowledge is currently seen as being unimportant and is often contrasted with the explicit theory and philosophy that universities communicate to students. Students need forms whereby they can pay attention to their implicit knowledge – bodily anchored consciousness. Observing and creating consciousness of implicit knowledge offers opportunities for more conscious choices and positions in professional practice. We believe that a fusion of both types of knowledge play a crucial role in workplaces, but that this role is rarely noted or dealt with.

**EXA as a creative pedagogical space**

EXA sees people in a broad complexity, in their bodily anchoring, their intersubjective dependence and their longing to keep searching – EXA sees the playful, curious, inquiring person. “People become people when they encounter people” (Apelmo 2009, p. 42), and our underlying assumption is that “communication in relation” is what constitutes people and thus the educational space, rather than solely communication through verbal language. This is a requirement for – and what constitutes – what it is to be a person in “meaning-bearing reciprocity” (Apelmo 2009, p. 51 ff.), something that we see as necessary in encounters with pupils, students, patients, clients, etc. It is therefore hard to be satisfied with the ready-made solutions and models presented in different contexts, regardless of whether this relates to leadership development or models for organising daycare staff in overly large groups of children – models and manuals that simplify and that do not take into account the entire person and the current contextual conditions. People are thereby reduced to tools for something else, where the only experience that is taken into account is that which is cognitively anchored and traditionally verbally communicated.

Stern’s (2004/2005) “current moment” concept describes those moments that change our lives. Current moments arise in and through intersubjective contact between people. A qualitative and transformative pedagogical education programme needs to create the right conditions for opportunities for current moments.When furnishing a pedagogical space, both physically and through the frameworks we establish socially and pedagogically, we create our own conditions to some extent. We create restrictions and open up opportunities. An innovative pedagogical space needs to restrict what is destructive and paralysing, and create opportunities for moments of *now* – in other words, an innovative pedagogical space should provide the right conditions to give deconstructing processes space to appear and create challenges that lead to constructive change. We believe that we must re-evaluate the traditional restrictions that are easily reproduced in our pedagogical spaces – restrictions on how we express ourselves, restrictions on how we can encounter each other, or restrictions on how we can experience the world around us and our relationships, etc.

Work in and through artistic forms of expression is based on practice, which in our context relates to an amalgamation of theory and practice, of body and thought, whose contents are linked to how we appear in our lives and our life contexts. This type of work is based on a strong belief in each person’s internal driving force towards the ability “to find that which is innovative” – to find “the point of growth” (Wahl 1978). The entire person is used for intersubjectively grounded knowledge capture that takes into account both the implicit knowledge contained in bodily anchored consciousness and the explicit knowledge contained in theory and philosophy. Change, professionalism and self-knowledge that are founded on lived experience and on theory and philosophy.

## **Room for play at university**

All pedagogical activities are location-related, earthbound, territorial, local and otherwise contextually bound (Løvlie 2007). Establishing an area for play requires an awareness of the significance of the location, the physical space, the formal space and the social space. As process leaders, we always enter a ‘space’ – a physical location. In this space, we, as professionals, want to come forward with our philosophy, our theory, our tools and our methods. We have an idea and an ambition about how our pedagogical efforts should be shaped in the encounter with the individuals who have gathered there. We also carry with us a formal space that constitutes the formal basis for encountering each other in the form of conditions, intentions and timeframes.

Our intention is to create space for play that corresponds to the challenges faced by universities.We all need to have access to a stage – in other words, a context or a space for pedagogical design – where we are seen and where we have the opportunity and the space to tell and, in a special way, seek to shape our life experience. We need spaces that offer opportunities for play and thus also for change. In our everyday lives, our family, friends and colleagues might offer such contexts regarding form and space. For some of us, however, it will be important for various reasons to find contexts over and above the everyday contexts for our communication and sharing. Universities have a natural and important function to fulfil. Communication through artistic forms of expression highlight students’ bodily anchored knowledge and experience – that which has not yet been formulated in words simultaneously with that which is already known and expressed. Conditions are created in which participants can safely try out, explore, experiment and seek alternative actions in the shaping of something new – something innovative – with a bearing capacity for future professional practice.

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1. This section is taken from Tedenljung 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Swedish National Union of Students (SFS), the Swedish Research Council, the Association of Swedish Higher Education and the Swedish Higher Education Authority. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Here, *the other* includes the alterity in *the Other* or *the others.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. EXA emerged in the US during the 1970s. Central figures within EXA include Paulo Knill and Margo Fuchs, Steve and Ellen Levine, Markus Alexander, Natalie Rogers, Arthur Robbins and Shaun McNiff in the USA. Scandinavian advocates include Sweden’s Margareta Wärja and Norway’s Melinda Meyer. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This section is based on Apelmo (2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Naturally, the boundaries between the artistic forms of expression are not so distinct as to appear in a schematic depiction as such. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. We use the term *process leader* to include other types of leaders of educational activities. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Thinking ‘body’ is an objectification. The objectification becomes clearer when we talk ‘body’, and ultimately becomes obvious when we write ‘body’. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. This work, which is based on EXA, will be documented in forthcoming articles. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)