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# 10 Embracing unpredictability

## A rhizomatic approach to arts integration in literacies and literary education

*Heidi Höglund and Sofia Jusslin*

### Introduction

Within several fields of educational sciences, researchers have shown an interest in notions of unpredictability in teaching. Researchers have begun to rethink learning and teaching in rhizomatic ways because of their interest in the unforeseen and the not predetermined. This chapter explores a notion of embracing unpredictability in transcurricular teaching by analytically exploring events from arts-integrated teaching in literacies and literary education. We adopt a rhizomatic approach (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2013) to theorize and try to understand the unpredictable in transcurricular teaching. With a rhizomatic approach, emphasis lies on that which is not yet known and on a multiplicity of intense connections and their movement in irregular and infinite directions. The rhizome as a theoretical approach provides us with possibilities to discuss unpredictability in the creative and interpretive processes of transcurricular teaching, in this chapter exemplified through arts integration in literacies and literature teaching.

As regards arts integration, Wiebe et al. (2007) submitted that a rhizomatic approach can enable integrative teaching practices, less prescriptive of the arts, arguing that integration must be understood broader than thematic overlaps in different subjects. For the arts to not act merely as a servant for another subject, Bresler (1995) maintains that arts integration should strive to be coequal. Our previous research and experiences of teaching literacies and literature with the arts demonstrate that despite thorough planning with formulated learning objectives in all included subjects, arts-integrated teaching can indeed unfold in very unpredictable ways (Höglund, 2017; Höglund & Rørbech, 2021; Jusslin, 2020, 2022). Therefore, Koff and Warner's (2001) suggestion that the goals for arts integration need to be set so that the project can "move into unexpected dimensions" (p. 145) is highly relevant. Wiebe et al. (2007) further argued that a rhizomatic approach can enable imaginative and flexible practices and understandings of arts-integrated teaching approaches. They suggested that a rhizomatic approach to integration "frees pedagogy from the processes which inevitably predict that implementation will look a particular way" (p. 270). As different subjects become integrated, the creative processes

can travel in unpredictable directions and cannot be predicted ahead of time (Jusslin, 2022).

Similar strains of thought circulate within literacies, language, and literary education. Teaching situations can travel in unforeseen ways, sometimes catching teachers by surprise (Kuby & Gutshall Rucker, 2020). Yet, this has implications for teaching. Kuby (2017) posed the question of “[h]ow might we plan in order to be flexible and see literacy (and learning more broadly) as unbounded, unpredictable, and inventive?” (p. 892). Similarly, within the context of language education, Waterhouse (2021) stated that pedagogy can happen in unexpected ways despite purposeful planning and that it is impossible to predict in advance how learning will unfold. This creates a destabilization of planned teaching. Moreover, several researchers have considered the potentials of undecidability, uncertainty, and unpredictability in literary education by, for example, stressing the importance of teaching students to handle uncertainty (Borsgård, 2021), embracing the not-knowing in literature teaching (Lindell, 2020), and advocating for upholding undecidabilities in the literature classroom (Johansen, 2019). Harstad (2018) emphasized the “unreasonable” of literature teaching that seeks to predetermine students’ encounters with literature.

In exploring a notion of embracing unpredictability in transcurricular teaching, we present two vignettes (see Jenkins et al., 2021) created from data from two research projects that combined poetry with other art forms: dancing in primary education (Jusslin, 2020) and video-making in lower secondary education (Höglund, 2017). Analytically, the vignettes invite readers to engage with two events where unpredictability was at stake. The transcurricular teaching approaches are thus understood as arts integration, aiming to promote students’ knowledge-creation in all included subjects (Bresler, 1995; Marshall, 2014).

In what follows, we discuss arts integration as a transcurricular teaching approach and present our understanding of rhizomatic approach. Afterward, we unfold the vignettes and conclude with a discussion of embracing unpredictability and its implications for transcurricular teaching, also situating the unpredictable of arts integration in literacies and literary education in relation to the notion of *Bildung* permeating the current volume (see Chapter 3).

### **Arts integration as a transcurricular teaching approach**

The transcurricular teaching approach explored in the current chapter is *arts integration*, which is a pedagogical approach to teaching a subject in combination with an art form, for example, drama, dance, visual arts, or music. Arts integration can be an innovative pedagogical approach to promoting understanding of and knowledge in various subjects through creating and engaging with the art(s) (Dowell & Goering, 2018; Hanna, 2015; Koff & Warner, 2001; Marshall, 2014). The body of research on arts integration has steadily increased in the twenty-first century, but there are some ambiguities in

how arts integration has been described conceptually. Burnaford et al. (2007) noted the lack of a shared, global understanding of how arts integration is defined. For example, concepts such as interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, arts-infused, and cross-disciplinary have been used when referring to arts integration (Bresler, 1995; Hanna, 2015; Koff & Warner, 2001; Marshall, 2014).

Our understanding and practical implementation of arts integration emphasize the goal to promote knowledge-creation in all included subjects, and we have worked specifically with dancing and video-making in combination with poetry in literacies and literary education (e.g., Höglund, 2017, 2022; Jusslin, 2020, 2022). We strive to work with what Bresler (1995) referred to as *co-equal integration*, where the art form is an equal partner with the other subject and where contents, skills, and modes of thinking are included from all respective subjects. In the mid-1990s, Bresler stated that scholarly literature advocates for this integration model, which literature still does today. Researchers have stated that for arts integration to be successful in practice, the subjects need to be mutually reinforcing and learning objectives need to be formulated in both subjects (Hanna, 2015; Koff & Warner, 2001; Marshall, 2014). Bresler (1995) contrasted the co-equal integration model with a *subservient integration model*, where the art form serves and “spices up” the other subject. Such an integration approach leaves the arts on an instrumental level, and it has been criticized by arts education scholars (e.g., Giguere, 2011; Winner et al., 2013).

In alignment with the overall conceptual framework of the current handbook (see Chapter 2), we understand arts integration as transcurricular teaching, signifying deep integration between school subjects (see also Marshall, 2014). As a transcurricular teaching approach, arts integration blurs subject boundaries in the teaching approaches we discuss in this chapter; poetry intertwines with dancing and video-making, preventing us from drawing clear boundaries between, for example, what is poetry and what is dancing when students create poetry dances (Jusslin, 2020).

### **Unpredictability: a rhizomatic approach**

We theoretically adopt a rhizomatic approach, which stems from Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987/2013) philosophy of immanence, to explore how the unpredictable might unfold in arts integration. Deleuze and Guattari (1987/2013) refer to the notion of rhizome as a tuber that spreads in irregular directions. It is a root system that connects to other root systems and grows horizontally and unpredictably. The ginger root is a helpful metaphor in this rhizomatic understanding. How does ginger root grow? Does it or can it grow in similar ways? Or is it always different, unpredictable?

Deleuze and Guattari (1987/2013) presented six principles of the rhizome, which we briefly summarize in the following. The rhizome is different from traditional linear or dualist metaphors, which Deleuze and Guattari (1987/2013) refer to the upward growth of a tree. Rhizomes, in contrast,

grow in irregular, non-hierarchical ways; they put forth shoots in the middle and grow in unpredictable ways. A rhizome can have multiple entry and exit points, creating new connections, thus making it difficult to identify beginnings or ends. If a rhizome is broken, it will start up again and find new connections, travel, and grow in unpredictable ways. The rhizome is composed of a multiplicity of intense connections that sustain a creative energy of their own. As such, a rhizome is not something static created by units, but rather dimensions and directions in motion. Deleuze and Guattari (1987/2013) describe how the rhizome operates by variation, expansion, offshoots, and pertains to a map that is always detachable, connectable, and modifiable. Thus, rhizomes are continuously and consistently unpredictable.

In this chapter, the rhizomatic approach and its emphasis on that which is not yet known is interesting in relation to the destabilization of planned teaching we mentioned in the introduction. A rhizomatic approach attempts to go beyond the predetermined positions and the repeated, previously known ways of thinking and doing, which is a core idea of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987/2013) philosophy. Instead, it focuses upon the ongoing creation of moving in different irregular and infinite directions that are unpredictable. A rhizomatic approach allows us to explore the notion of embracing unpredictability in transcurricular teaching.

The rhizomatic approach also fuels our understanding of arts integration, building on Wiebe et al.'s (2007) reimagining of arts integration that uses the notions of rhizome and a/r/tography. *A/r/tography* emphasizes the intertwinements of artist/researcher/teacher and is a practice-based inquiry developed to emphasize an artful understanding of teaching and learning. Using a rhizomatic approach, Wiebe et al. suggested that a/r/tography can act as a relational bridge, where arts integration can grow in several, and unknown, directions all at once. More specifically, a rhizomatic approach to integration "renews and fuses what are traditionally separate roles" (Wiebe et al., 2007, p. 268). Such traditional separate roles can, for example, be dance and literacies (see Jusslin, 2020). Wiebe et al. (2007) further maintained that teachers sometimes tend to look for a technique or method to make arts integration as smooth as possible, searching for a kind of map. In contrast, they stated that a benefit of arts integration, seen from a rhizomatic approach, is the messiness, because the arts integration might move in multiple and unknown directions.

Next, we present two vignettes in which we invite readers to engage with events where we as teachers and researchers grappled and struggled with unpredictable happenings in arts-integrated teaching. The vignettes are created based on video-observations and our personal participation, observations, and memories from these events (Höglund, 2017; Jusslin, 2020). Following each vignette, we connect the vignettes with the theoretical approach of the rhizome and discuss pedagogical matters of concern in relation to transcurricular teaching that have arisen from these events.

### Unpredictability hindered: “no chairs, no tables” rupture

During a research project that integrated dancing and literacies education (Jusslin, 2020), two classes of fifth-grade students integrated poetry reading and dancing. I (Sofia) collaborated with two primary schoolteachers and a dance teacher on this project. Engaging with the never seen before animal *Quinellan* in the picturebook *Djur som ingen sett utom vi* [Animals that no one has seen except for us] (Stark & Bondestam, 2016), the students in one of the classes worked in groups and scattered across different spaces in the school, working collaboratively to express and create their interpretations of *Quinellan* through dance. Although we had done several dance-based activities in relation to creative writing earlier, this was the first time we explored reading and poetry integrated with dancing. Poetry was rather unfamiliar to the students and some of them openly stated that poetry is dull. We were a bit uncertain how poetry reading and dancing would unfold. Therefore, we wanted to provide support and clear frames around the poetry reading and dance activity, steering the students’ interpretative work toward working with emotions and messages using their voices, rhythm instruments (e.g., maracas and tambourines), and bodies in their dances (Jusslin & Höglund, 2021).

During the students’ interpretative and creative work, the dance teacher, the primary schoolteachers, and I moved between the groups to support them. Two students, Isac and Casper (pseudonyms), suddenly moved away from the three other students in their group, who were sitting on the floor bent over the poem or standing and exploring different movements of the animal. I watched Isac and Casper move away, wondering what they were up to. The others in the group were negotiating who the animal *Quinellan* is and discussing the loneliness and sadness that she feels, echoing the sentences “Just below the surface lives/her silent twin brother/She says: ‘You, my only friend’” (Stark & Bondestam, 2016, our translation). As Isac and Casper started moving chairs and tables, I walked up to them, wondering what they were doing, a bit unsure if their doings were at all related to the poem the others were working with. They responded shortly that they needed the chairs and tables. I reminded the students about the frames of the poetry and dance activity. In that moment, for me, this meant using solely their voices and bodies and creating music.

Later, when the group performed their poetry dance for the other students, the group had created a narrative about *Quinella* being bullied, expressing the sadness and loneliness she felt. Despite my reminder to use voices, bodies, and music, the students had extended their dance using materials, passing a piece of paper with a written cruel message between the dancers to set the bullying of *Quinellan* in motion. The piece of paper gave life to the students’ message of the cruelty and the consequences of bullying, and after the performance, the students shared how their poetry dance expresses “how the truth always comes out,” because *Quinellan* found out who had written the nasty message. At that time, for us teachers, the students had interpreted, expressed, and created *Quinellan* in an innovative and cross-artistic way.

The same lesson plan was executed with the other class of fifth graders directly after. As we approached the performances toward the end of the lesson, I realized that the dance teacher had enabled a student group to use materials when encountering a similar situation as I previously did. A chair became the rock on which a student who danced the Quinellan animal sat, looking down on her reflection, danced by another student who was lying under the chair and mirroring Quinellan's movements. As I watched this performance, it regretfully struck me that my earlier reminder, steering Isac and Casper away from the chairs and tables, hindered opportunities to interpret, express, and create Quinellan in other and different ways where the chairs and tables could have become important parts of their poetry dance.

### *What did we miss?*

This vignette raises the question "what did we miss?" Isac and Casper took off in an unpredictable direction when going for chairs and tables – a direction I regrettably closed off as a teacher. The unpredictable was hindered rather than embraced, only within a few seconds. Indeed, as a teacher, I had the opportunity to metaphorically go off the script (the lesson plan and instructions) and follow the students' doings with chairs and tables – like the dance teacher did with the other class – but at that moment, I chose not to. I felt the need to control the messiness of the arts-integrated teaching. I disrupted Isac and Casper and the chairs and the tables, which can be understood as a rupture in the rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2013). This feeds into the question. Isac and Casper's rhizomatic path was broken and they were forced to move forward in other ways. In other words, the rhizome lived on, but without chairs and tables. My interfering with the doings with the chairs and the tables might have functioned as a creativity-fostering disrupter as well. Although I regretted my steering reminder within the hour of this event, I can only speculate what might have become of the students' poetry dance if I had not steered them away from the chairs and tables. One can wonder if putting an end to the chairs and tables required the students to do something new and different that they would not have done with the chairs and tables, perhaps using the piece of paper on which they wrote a cruel comment.

The question "what did we miss?" give rise to additional questions that have implications for transcurricular teaching – and teaching overall. Reflecting on what happens in this vignette, unpredictability was more a foe than a friend. But why is that? Is it always important to stick with the lesson plan, the instructions, and framework, and to seek control of what happens in the classroom? What happens when we as teachers shut down students' creative and innovative ideas, instead of seeing where it may take us in arts integration – and teaching overall? What do sought-after predictability and control of teaching do in relation to students' opportunities for knowledge-creation and creativity? Accordingly, this vignette showcases struggles with embracing the messiness of arts-integrated teaching and the unpredictabilities that it might hold.



### Unpredictability allowed: “goofing around” creating intense connections

During a research project integrating visual arts and literature (Höglund, 2017), a group of eighth-grade students worked with video-making in response to poetry. Inspired by poet Molly Peacock’s reference to poetry as “the screen-size art” (Hughes, 2008, p. 149), with its conciseness of form but not of content, I (Heidi) was interested in exploring the use of visual responses as a means of interpreting poetry. In doing so, I collaborated with a literature teacher and a visual arts teacher. In this vignette, the students worked with the poem *Jag vill möta . . .* [I want to meet . . .] by the Swedish poet and novelist Karin Boye (1900–1941), first published in 1927, a poem of their own choice.

The teachers emphasized an open approach to interpreting poetry. They emphasized the figurative meaning of poetic language, for example, by introducing literary concepts (e.g., imagery, metaphor, and simile) and discussing different formats of poems, rhythm, rhyme, and tone. They assigned the students to compose the digital video with four different phases: initial responses and writing a synopsis, making a storyboard, filming, and editing. Besides these instructions, some explanations on the format of storyboard, and a short technical introduction to the camera and editing software, the students were not given strict guidelines for the task; rather, they were given space and freedom for initiatives.

Although following a “rationale” for the video-making process, the students’ process involved several exploratory and unexpected discoveries – often due to the materialities involved (see Höglund & Rørbech, 2021). The students found their way, for example, as they tested different settings, locations, and camera angles. As the students started filming, they were challenged to (re)negotiate their earlier work with creating a synopsis and storyboard. Apart from the video camera, the editing software made a considerable difference in the students’ interpretive work, as they were experimenting with sound and visual effects, sequencing of clips, and various transitions. It is worth mentioning that the teacher was most probably aware of the pedagogical potential of exploring, since immediately after giving some basic instructions about the editing program, he said: “Now you may test as you go forward.”

As I watched the students gather around the computer, testing and playing with different sound effects in the editing software, my initial reaction – and probably not an unusual one – was that I wanted them to stop “goofing around” and focus on the assignment. However, I did not intervene. At that point, I was slightly worried: Will they be ready on time, or even worse, will they get anything done at all? Now, however, I am glad that I did not intervene. It turned out that “goofing around” with different sound effects was an immensely valuable and important part of the process.

For the students, the sound effects in the editing program played a crucial role. Particularly their *testing* of different sound effects included trying out all – and I mean all – possible sound effects that the program offered. Hearing



the sound effect of church bells ringing, they joked about the characters in the digital video getting married. However, this remark, acting as an intense connection (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2013), threw the students to further elaborate their interpretation of not only finding and showing one's true self in relation to sexuality but also relating this issue to a social and political issue of topical interest at that point. At the time of the project, Finnish law did not allow people of the same sex to marry, and this issue was subject to widespread debate in the media and in politics. This example showcases the unforeseen connections and directions that students' "goofing around" with the editing software involved.

*What can "goofing around" set in motion?*

This vignette raises the question "what can 'goofing around' set in motion?" Instead of dismissing students' playful and seemingly unproductive messing around, what about acknowledging what such processes might set in motion? Such an approach underlines the necessity of shifting the focus of interpretive activity not as projected toward some textual end point but as forming relations and connections, often in unexpected ways (see Leander & Boldt, 2013). In a way, it felt like "goofing around" in the editing software drew away attention from the interpretative activity with the poem, creating frictions in the blending of poetry and video-making in the transcurricular teaching. However, it was the opposite – the "goofing around" became productive.

The vignette highlights the rhizomatic features of the messiness of "goofing around" as it included multiple entry and exit points in the exploratory trying out of sound effects, which set intense connections in motion. The intense connections of the "goofing around" sustained a creative energy of their own. The sound effect of church bells involved a creative energy that threw the students into unforeseen connections and relations. The "goofing around" with the sound effects sparked an intensity regarding the poem's topicality in contemporary society. Consequently, "goofing around" might disguise, reveal, or set in motion valuable doings and explorations, not always easily visible or even accessible for teachers.

Still, did we miss something? Even though the vignette in many ways allowed unpredictability, we need to be careful not to consider it as some kind of "best practice." Here, too, we can ask: What did we miss? Leaving students to "goof around" in arts-integrated teaching – or in any given teaching situation – will probably not be a productive default approach. The event of "goofing around" with the editing program involved several moments that could have been further explored and developed if, for example, noticed and picked up by the teacher. So rather than leaving the students alone to "goof around," these interpretive processes could be followed up and explored together with the students, exploring where they might take us: not just allowing unpredictability but embracing it.

### Embracing unpredictability: moving toward *what happens if?*

The vignettes presented earlier showcase various forces and struggles in facing students' unpredictable doings in arts-integrated teaching in literacies and literary education. In closing the chapter, we argue for the pedagogical value of *embracing* unpredictability in arts integration – and other cross- or transcurricular teaching approaches – yet recognizing the challenges for teachers in such a mindset and teaching approach.

The two questions raised in relation to the vignettes – What did we miss? And What can “goofing around” set in motion? – gave rise to feelings of failure and regret as well as a fear of students messing around and not taking the assignment seriously, as showcased earlier. For us, such feelings were intertwined with the pedagogical choices we made in the arts-integrated teaching. (Re)considering the pedagogical choices that we make as teachers is by no means revolutionary; in contrast, it lies at the core of being a teacher. Intervening in what happens in the classroom is inevitably a part of being a teacher, and although teachers might regret certain pedagogical choices, we do not suggest that this affects students in bad ways. Still, we stress the need to pay close attention to how pedagogical choices produce possibilities not only to follow but also to divert from and reinvent the plan and formulated instructions in the moment of teaching. This accentuates a destabilization of planned teaching, which we admit is of importance in transcurricular teaching that does not have a ready-made script (see Chapter 3). However, planned teaching and an open-mindedness to students' unpredictable doings are not an either/or issue but a both/and. They do not need to cancel each other out, rather they need to coexist for teachers to be able to embrace the unpredictable. Such a coexistence is discussed by Klausen and Mård (see Chapter 3) as part of a Bildung-oriented teaching, where planned teaching allows for unpredictability. However, we recognize – and have experienced – challenges in maintaining such a both/and approach, which resonates with Kuby's (2017) highly relevant question about *how* to plan teaching to make space for unpredictability.

Therefore, we propose that the question of *What happens if?* might enable teachers to embrace the unpredictable turns and intense connections that can happen in arts integration and transcurricular teaching. Our proposal echoes Taylor (2018) who discussed that the question points toward doings as experiments for which we do not have a predetermined plan, map, or template. When teachers are struck with feeling the need to control, steer, or intervene, the question of *What happens if?* can act as an invitation to embrace the unknown. As showcased in the vignettes, despite thorough and thoughtful planning of arts integration as transcurricular teaching, teachers cannot know or anticipate where students creative and interpretive work will end up and what it can set in motion (Waterhouse, 2021, also see Chapter 3). Notably, it is difficult to fully foresee what knowledge students will create (e.g., Jusslin, 2022; Kuby & Gutshall Rucker, 2020, also see Chapter 3). For example, the planned teaching in the two vignettes had an open approach to interpreting

the poetry. There was no set goal, interpretation, or understanding to reach. Nevertheless, friction emerged when different subjects and art forms became integrated in the transcurricular teaching, and the pedagogical realities made us act differently as teachers and researchers, either hindering or allowing students' unpredictable doings. The frameworks and tools available in the doings were predetermined, leading up not only to the "no chairs, no tables" rupture, but also to the "goofing around" with the sound effects. Therefore, asking "what happens if?" could make the transcurricular teaching about collaborative doings and co-experimentation. We suggest that the rhizomatic approach is one way to be responsive to unpredictabilities in teaching, since it focuses on the multiple, flexible, and constantly changing connections. Notably, the rhizomatic approach moves from what is the expected result of teaching toward *what it might become* and *where the teaching might take* students and teachers. Again, this feeds the approach of embracing the openness and unforeseen, the "what happens if?"

Again, we acknowledge and have experienced that embracing unpredictability through the question of "what happens if?" might be challenging as it deviates from a clear map, template, or end result of teaching. This could move the transcurricular teaching toward an opportunistic approach or curriculum negotiation (see Chapter 2), where unpredictable moments of opportunities are seized, negotiated, and followed rather than constrained. We submit that embracing unpredictability particularly requires a (re)consideration of what *planning* can do and set in motion as well as how teachers transform the initial plan in relation to possible unpredictable doings; it requires a step across the threshold into the unknown, perhaps a messy unknown. Indeed, arts integration is messy, and embracing unpredictability opts for "reducing the inclination to clean up the mess" (Wiebe et al., 2007, p. 270). Such messiness might feel uncomfortable and unfamiliar – even scary – and trusting in creative processes can be challenging, even more so if teachers themselves lack experience of engaging in similar exploratory and creative arts-integrated processes. Nevertheless, this chapter points toward how embracing unpredictability might set in motion valuable doings, as well as make us (re)consider previous doings.

In conclusion, this chapter has problematized embracing unpredictability in arts integration as a transcurricular teaching approach. Still, it can also be relevant to teaching more generally. Consequently, embracing unpredictability calls for a particular responsiveness to students' unpredictable doings through a both/and approach where planned teaching coexists with the opportunities to divert from and reinvent the plan. It requires taking a leap of faith and trusting the process.

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