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Author(s): Kalmanlehto, Johan; Tuukkanen, Johanna; Muyanja, Michael

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CHAPTER 6
Sharing and Caring

*Johan Kalmanlehto, Johanna
Tuukkanen & Michael Muyanja*

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the FADS symposia and the functioning of the network in between the actual gatherings, and to explain the meetings and their significance to everyone's dissertation work. Three FADS students who participated in the symposia and engaged in the different assignments wrote this chapter together. The description and discussion is based on our own experiences, and on the observations and discoveries we have made about others during our face-to-face conversations, and from the online forum that functioned as a common space for further commentary and discussion between meetings. The title of the chapter refers to two of the three tasks that constituted the activity of the network between the meetings; *sharing and responding to foundational texts*, and *researching research*. The main point is to explain the purpose and execution of these tasks, and to reflect on their meaning to the students' own doctoral research. However, the functioning of FADS has been more than mere mandatory schoolwork assignments; performing the tasks fostered discussion and cooperation during the symposia, a result of the experiment discussing the individual problems of the students' research projects. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the places where the face-to-face encounters took place, and on the social spaces that formed between the students, coordinators and guests.

The Places

The FADS symposia were held in three universities, providing three distinct working environments. Meeting in all three places had an impact on the inner dynamics, mood, and formation of the network. This was especially true in Lapland and Central Finland, where the meetings were held away from the campus area—Keropirtti was approximately 100 km from Rovaniemi, and Konnevesi Research Station, 60 km from Jyväskylä. These locations were close to nature, away from the bustle of the urban environment and everyone's daily life, although not completely isolated. The places were unfamiliar to most students and being together in such locations produced a

distinct feeling. This feeling was different than the third meeting in Helsinki, which was held at Aalto ARTS, without collective lodging, and didn't feel as isolated from daily life. In Lapland, for example, the participants walked a short path between the cabins and the building to get to the symposium and dinner. This walk together at the foot of the mountain Pyhätunturi reminded us of the location, its geography and nature, which was for many students different from their usual working environments. Some also chose to utilize the breaks to get some fresh air and examine the surroundings closer. The Konnevesi Research Station environment in Central Finland had its own distinct quality. While working together, we benefited from the proximity of nature and the calming effect of the fresh autumn weather. It should be noted that the station is also used as a board and lodging retreat for students writing theses, for which the University of Jyväskylä provides grants.

The Beginning

The first two FADS symposia commenced in a similar manner. First, there was a keynote lecture at the campus, then transportation to a more remote location, where the symposium would take place. The bus ride through the darkness of late autumn was not merely a geographical transport, but a transition in terms of context and mood. It created an enhanced focus within the network. The first meeting in Rovaniemi was exciting; there were other Ph.D. students, professors, post-doc researchers and international guests. Most of the FADS students and coordinators travelled to Rovaniemi from different parts of Finland. For many, there was a sense of adventure and new journey in the air. For some, it was also a stressful situation—after all, we were to present our research topics in front of everyone. Differences in circumstances and backgrounds affected stress levels, too. Some students were comfortable and familiar with publicly presenting their work while others were not. In addition, for those who had just begun their doctoral studies, it was their first time speaking in front of such an audience.



Figure 1. *Pyhäntunturi, Lapland, was the site for the first FADS symposium.
Photo: Johanna Tuukkanen.*

The experience from the first symposium was hurried; students presented their research projects on a very tight schedule and received feedback mostly from the coordinators and guests. Everyone had read, commented, and replied to each other's research abstracts beforehand. Besides the keynote lecture by Jan Jagodzinski, the coordinators, professors, post-doc researchers, and international guests did not thoroughly introduce their research areas to the doctoral students. This might have created additional anxiety for some participants. The coordinators and guests were accommodated in a separate location from the students, and informal communication between them was limited to dinners and breaks. In the evenings, students socialized and discussed matters further in their rooms and sauna, which built a rapport for the future. After leaving Lapland, however, there was not much contact between the participants, and the network felt practically dormant until the next meeting.

The Discussions

The second symposium was organized into workshops, which included whole-group sessions and smaller working group sessions. Students were to share individual research experiences in the whole-group sessions, while students with similar research interests gathered into smaller groups. The coordinators divided students into smaller groups by three categories: "Spaces, places, and politics," "Subject and subjectification," and "School." The groups comprised students from all three universities. Because everyone was already familiar with each other, the atmosphere was more relaxed than in Lapland a year earlier.

Within the small groups, students were tasked with discussing prompts (assignments) given by coordinators. These included our positions as researchers, the role of personal experience and subjectivity as resources, problems in research, handling of data, research ethics, choices of focus and strategies, and the relationship between theory and data. Students were also asked to consider their contributions to earlier research, and the research tradition



Figure 2. *The second FADS symposium was held at the Konnevesi Research Station in Central Finland. Photo: Johan Kalmanlehto.*

into which they were aiming to locate their study. Other prompts concerned research design, defending decisions made in the research process, problems of multi-, inter-, and transdisciplinarity, and conceptual choices and their implications. There were a significant amount of ideas to discuss, and the group work sessions were intense and productive. Naturally, not all the prompts were addressed, as the conversation was focused on individual research concerns. The groups attempted to address everyone's issues equally, but some students received more attention than others. This might be explained because students were at different stages in their research. Some doctoral students had worked full time on their research between the symposia, while others had very few opportunities to do so. Some students also had more pressing issues than others. However, the uneven focus could also be a result, in part, of the natural flow of discussion.

The coordinators circulated from group to group, listening and providing feedback. Everyone demonstrated interest in the different points of view and that helped to set the scene to explore the contexts of individual research work. Thus, everyone talked through the details of their research areas and related problems: How to deal with the contexts of the research and how to adequately improve the work in order to reach its goals. The group work also provided students a chance, as researchers, to offer each other feedback and criticism about their fears, successes, expectations, failures, likes and dislikes, and dreams and thoughts. Certain groups also agreed to give each other tasks intended for supporting each other's research process, with specified deadlines. Lack of daily supervision and guidance led them to assign each other supervisory responsibilities; for example, reminding each other to allow enough time to write and to discover more ways of improving research questions.

Because the second symposium was held at the Konnevesi Research Station, it gave the professors and students means to deal with different hindrances to the advancement of the research. For example, the groups were advised to take an excursion through the surrounding nature. Some went for a walk in the nearby forest, a quiet place without disruptions apart from the small chirps coming

from birds, and the bubbling stream maundering down to the lake. One group discovered a wooden hut-type cottage with a fireplace, and decided to have their final talk around the warmth of a campfire. Similar to the environment in Lapland, the nature of central Finland had an effect on the work of most groups. This time, the coordinators and the keynote guest were accommodated in the same place as the students, which resulted in more cohesion and opportunities for discussion than during the first symposia.

After the group work, students gathered to share results, in addition to contacting the professors for necessary feedback. What was important at this stage was to discuss the self-disclosures so professors could offer feedback and guidance intended for present and future actions. Each group then presented the results of their work to others. For the most part, these presentations did not seem carefully structured or prepared because there was not much time to do so. The presentations were based on group work, and some groups spent more time discussing their ideas than preparing how to communicate to others. Students seemed slightly frustrated at not having time to prepare sufficiently. However, the group work itself was more important, and the discussion continued during the whole-group session.

The Tasks

Based on the experience of both symposia (2014 and 2015), as well as the group work and discussions, the coordinators developed tasks to be completed online: *sharing and responding to foundational texts*, *researching research*, and *role-playing and swapping research*. The rest of this chapter focuses on the first two, and the third will be addressed in Chapter Seven. For *sharing and responding to foundational texts*, every student chose a text (a book chapter, article, excerpt from a book, etc.) that would help other students understand important concepts, approaches, or theories of her or his dissertation research. The text and a brief explanation of its relevance to the dissertation were shared within the group, who then read the text and posted

questions and observations about it, to which the student who posted the text had to respond. There was less than a month's time to share one foundational text related to each researchers' thesis, and another month to respond to everyone else's foundational texts and provide additional feedback, as needed. Below are some examples of the foundational texts shared within each group.

Spaces, places, politics

Gaskill, K: *In Search of the Social – Toward an Understanding of the Social Curator*

Lawrence Lessig: *Book Code 2.0*

Kaisu Kortelainen: *Muistin kuvia tehdasyhteisöstä. Moniaistisuus etnografiassa ja muistitietotutkimuksessa*

Suzanne Lacy: *Despated Territory*

School

Juha Varto: *Song of the Earth – Lectures on Ethics*

Carter R. I. and Simmons B.: *The History and Philosophy of Environmental Education*

Marjo Räsänen: *Cultural Identity and Visual Multiliteracy*

Arnold Berleant: *Aesthetics Beyond the Arts: New and Recent Essays*

Subject and subjectification

Simon O'Sullivan: *The Aesthetics of Affect – Thinking Art Beyond Representation*

Vilma Hänninen: *A Model of Narrative Circulation*

Friedrich Nietzsche: *The Dionysiac World View*

Jennifer Eisenhauer: *Just Looking and Staring Back – Challenging Ableism Through Disability Performance Art*

Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe: *Typography*

For the *researching research* task, the timeframe was slightly longer as the students were asked to post their abstracts within four months after the symposium. Deadlines caused some problems: “I’m very sorry for the delay in posting my foundational text,” and “Sorry for the late answer” were common posts. The texts also varied in length, and not everyone had time to read them: “This looks very interesting, but unfortunately I don’t have time now to read it all.” Nevertheless, everyone received curious and critical comments about their foundational texts, and explored the foundations of the research projects of other students.

The *researching research* task was meant to widen the scope of the dissertation research and provide supportive examples from areas outside of its field of study. Each student was asked to seek out research that was in any way related to a concept, approach, structure, or subject of the dissertation; produced outside Finland and focused on different fields of study or disciplines. A minimum of six examples had to be summarized for other students. This time the task was shared with all students instead of the small groups, but there was no explicit requirement to read or comment on what others had found. This task was generally received as an opportunity to widen the perspective of the research and to learn something new. Some students found useful references, while for others the task was an excursion to foreign territory. Some of the examined research was still in the field of art education, but approached topics from different perspectives or used similar concepts in a different manner. Some found interesting research outside the field of art education, to include research in the following disciplines: philosophy, psychology, neuropsychology, neuroscience, psychiatry, sociology, critical pedagogy, ethnography, economic history, cultural anthropology, indigenous research, theology, border studies, and women’s studies, and other fields of education, such as sustainability and education, and religious education. Some of the students’ dissertations were already multidisciplinary, and thus included references outside the field of art education before the task, but everyone found something new and interesting.

Looking back at the two tasks and the discussions around them, it is clear that they impacted positively on the students' research processes. It is a very useful task to define one foundational text, whether a book or an article, which is central to the research in question. The task can be viewed as a methodological tool to define and sharpen the focus of one's research while providing fellow researchers a simple gateway into someone else's ongoing research theme. Moreover, researching research is an integral part of any researcher's work, but whereas relevant research is limited usually to the subject matter within one's own field, the *researching research* task required students to search beyond their own disciplines and research fields. Based on the students' reflections, the task functioned as a useful tool to recognize the uniqueness and characteristics of the discipline of art education, to reflect on each researcher's personal approach, and to consider the sufficient scale of the dissertation. Overall, the task was intriguing, inspiring, encouraging and educational.

Although the tasks were refreshing and provided positive methodological tools, they also presented challenges. As stated earlier, there were comments such as "I don't have time to read the whole text" or "Very sorry for the delay." As one FADS student wrote:

At Konnevesi I really looked forward to this task. I saw myself, during dark winter evenings, cozily embarked in the sofa, surrounded with lots of interesting books, deepened in thoughts about development of art education. Ha! My winter was embarked with a lot of other things than this and when I got so far to give it some time I found the task really challenging. (K. Korsström-Magga, personal communication, May 10, 2016)

As an exercise completed in an online learning environment, neither of the tasks seemed to differ much from typical online courses, although these tasks were directly related to everyone's own research rather than a specific course topic or theme. However, one thing made a difference: As the network had been formed beforehand, the students were familiar with each other's research. Thus, the tasks

seemed more meaningful because they were not arbitrary encounters with strangers. The *researching research* task was solitary work and did not lend itself to cooperation, although it was interesting to see the students' diverse approaches to the task. In this task the students did not relate so much to each other as to different research methodologies and disciplines.

Did FADS function as a network in regards to these tasks? Some of the tasks might have felt like extra work, beyond the actual dissertation work. However, the network brought to individual research something that would have been difficult to access alone: It forced students to explain their research to others, and allowed them to acknowledge the difficulty of doing so. Reciprocally, the narrow perspective from which students viewed their own research was broadened through exposure to other doctoral research projects within art education. This was especially the case during the task of *sharing and responding to foundational texts*, which applied others' perspectives to one's own theoretical foundations.

Challenges and Difficulties

As in many professions, regardless of the field, time management is a serious issue for researchers. There is always more to read, understand, write, publish, and generally more to do. Amongst the FADS students, there are those who have funding to pursue research on a full-time basis, those who have some funding to focus on their research part-time, and others who are working full-time and pursuing their research besides their job(s). In observing the timelines in which students completed the tasks and the frequency with which they were able to engage in online dialogue, it became evident the students had varied amounts of time available to dedicate to their research.

We believe that the task of *sharing and responding to foundational texts* may have been more helpful if it would have evoked further discussion, but this did not happen with all students. Everyone commented on each other's texts and asked some questions, which

were then answered. Further discussion could have been fruitful because the groups had been formed according to similar research interests; consequently, the topics of the texts were closely related to each other. After completing the assignment to read, comment, and respond to comments, not everyone had the time, resources, or incentive to continue discussion. The task was nevertheless interesting, and with face-to-face discussion the comments could have been followed by more discussion. In other words, having students provide commentary and discussion on a given task in an online environment was efficient in terms of time management, but did not encourage a time investment in additional discussion. However, perhaps this was not the purpose after all—reading other’s foundational texts and commenting on them already offered something to consider, and helped students understand what others were doing. Responding to the questions about one’s own text was especially helpful because it allowed a student to put intellectual distance between her or his work and see the texts from another perspective.

Differences and Diversity

The symposia gathered doctoral students to share and discuss their research projects. There were differences between research topics, methodologies, types of theses, and states of research. As a network, or even a community or a society, when actually working together we were able to develop our research identities in relation to each other. Different stages of research and time available to dedicate to work with the dissertation impacted what the network meant to each student. The network also gave everyone an opportunity to experience three different universities and art education programs in Finland. Although doctoral students’ research topics varied, we characterize the differences in programs based on our reading of all the FADS participants. We see that Aalto ARTS’s art education field focused on visual culture and critical pedagogy. At the University of Jyväskylä, the focus seems to be more on artistic expression as well

as experiencing and understanding art through diverse forms and practices. At the University of Lapland the emphasis seems to be on experiential learning, applied arts, and contemporary art in arctic surroundings. This is another strength of the FADS network, in that it promotes different dialogical and collaborative approaches to art education, and embraces diverse perspectives rather than highlighting differences in a competitive and hierarchical manner.

For us, the strength of FADS has been its ability to support each individual research process and facilitate the incorporation of their differences into the network. While the tasks have enabled fruitful dialogues for some students, for others they have functioned as an incentive to stay connected to and involved in their own research, besides the challenges of jobs, other projects, family, or what might be called life. In short, the tasks and the FADS network in general has supported students in not only learning essential tools and facing challenges in conducting research, but it has also offered communal support in building identities as researchers, whether students are in the very beginning of their doctoral theses, deep in the creative chaos of research process, or ready to defend their theses.

In sum, the work within FADS allowed us to learn how to interact; how we can and should communicate and act both formally and informally; how we relate and speak to professors, guest lecturers, and each other, specifically. In this way, the meetings were about learning how to be together, learning what the network is about and what it could be about. Shared time and focused discussion were helpful because often there is not enough time to share research concerns with other doctoral students; even at the university, but more evidently if one writes the dissertation at home. The network meetings provided a common space and dedicated time to address pressing questions about doctoral research. FADS provided a context for forming a researcher identity, by understanding the differences and similarities between each other.