Qualitative Studies
Vol. 11, No. 1, 2026, pp. 296-317
ISSN 1903-7031

Dare to Draw in Academia

Heidi Hautopp[1]
Julie Kordovsky[1]
Mie Buhl[1]

[1] *Department of Culture and Communication, Aalborg University, Denmark*
A.C. Meyers Vænge 15, 2450 Copenhagen SV, Denmark

Challenging the 'wall of text' in academia, we explore how drawing as a practice for knowledge creation can lead to new academic insights. The empirical data is based on our own drawing practices in research within higher education and organizational studies. Using drawing as an ethnographic approach, graphic facilitation, and care aesthetics, we invite scholars and practitioners alike to explore how drawing can enrich academic inquiry processes across fields. Through examples, we take a point of departure in our own engagements with participants in drawing exercises and dialogues relevant to their contexts. We analyse significant perspectives on how to tackle different situations when drawing is applied as a research practice. We are particularly interested in exploring how the act of "daring to draw" is negotiated in moments when participants experience frustration, discomfort and doubt about their own drawing abilities, or even choose to decline our invitation to take charge of the pens and pencils themselves. In these situations, drawing emerges as a relational practice shaped by interactions, emotions, and roles within the research setting. Rather than viewing the penholder as the sole research drawer, we propose understanding drawing as a shared and negotiated activity, where meaning is co-created through participation, hesitation, and refusal alike. This paper argues that when drawing is employed as a research method, it not only generates valuable context-sensitive knowledge but also demands careful attention to the evolving roles and actions of both researchers and participants.

Keywords: Drawing as a research practice, arts-based research, co-creation, higher education, organisational studies.

Introduction

In recent decades, there has been a turn towards greater acknowledgement of the use of visual methods in research (Pink, 2007; Rose, 2016), also challenging what we as researchers sometimes experience as the 'wall of text' in academia. Sociologist Patricia Leavy has identified limitations in traditional academic articles, prompting her to turn to expressive art. In her book *Method Meets Art* (2020), Leavy aims to harness the power of the arts in research endeavours. She emphasises how we as researchers are often trained

to hide our relationship to our work, which she describes as problematic for some and impossible for others. Leavy argues that arts-based research (ABR) practices enable researchers to share their relationship to their work with the audience who experiences it. Leavy further explains that some researchers adopt ABR practices to better address research questions, while others "*explicitly long to merge their scholar-self with their artist-self*" (Leavy, 2020, p. 3). This quote resonates with our way of doing research, where we aim at combining our scholar-self with our artist-self when using drawings to better address research questions. Each of us has different experiences with the act of drawing in research and have attended different courses and training. However, none of us are professional artists, so grounded in a pragmatic approach (e.g. Dewey, 1938; Schön, 1983; 1992), we explore the use of drawing through experiments involving participants combined with theoretical reflections.

In our work as drawing researchers, we are inspired by ABR methods (Leavy, 2020) especially the use of drawing as an ethnographic approach in qualitative research (Ingold, 2011, 2016; Causey, 2017; Douglas-Jones, 2021). Leavy (2020, p. 4) defines ABR practices as: "a set of methodological tools used by researchers across disciplines during any or all phases of research". Leavy further emphasises that ABR draws on a variety of representational formats including novels, poems, collages, painting, drawings, sculptures, dances, films, etc. In our study, we are specifically interested in the use of drawings related to research practices. We argue - and all three of us build on the shared premise - that the use of drawings can support the exploration of research questions in holistic and engaged ways in which theory and practice are intertwined (Leavy, 2020, p. 4). Our aim with this article is to discuss the use of drawing as a research practice, with a focus on how to work with the obstacles that arise when using drawing in different participatory processes. For this purpose, we will present selected empirical examples from our research which serve as backbone for a conceptual discussion of the use of drawing as a research practice.

Research question and methodological considerations

Based on our prior research (Hautopp & Buhl, 2021; Hautopp, 2021; Hautopp, 2022; Hautopp, 2023; Kordovsky, 2024; Kordovsky & Pallesen, 2024), we have observed various conflicting emotions expressed by participants and ourselves when introducing

drawing as a participatory method, bringing our attention to the need for somehow embracing the messy complexity that follows co-creation processes (Philips, 2025). These moments of tension, hesitation, and resonance can be understood as *critical incidents* (Tidwell et al., 2020), in the practice we ourselves have been entangled in. We approach the investigation of these moments from a self-study approach which provides a discussion of professional practice (Pinnegar, 1998), in our case the drawing as a research practice. When thinking with self-studies as methodology, critical incidents serve as analytical entry points for focused investigation. They are born throughout moments that disturb, provoke, or illuminate aspects of practice that we tend to move away from. According to Laboesky (2004), self-studies are focused on improvement and self-initiated, they are interactive and involve multiple, mainly qualitative methods. In our collaborative self-study we have used drawings and fieldnotes as catalysts for our collaborative reflection and discussion to further develop and improve our research practice. Our employment of visual fragments from our own drawing practices has allowed us to revisit our fields and to engage with its complexity together (see more about collective self-study approach in Rohwedder, Møller & Kordovsky, 2024).

In her call to *stay with the trouble,* Haraway (2016) advocates for a mode of being that remains *present and responsible within the mess* - a commitment to *entanglement* and *response-ability* (p.12), which has inspired us in the process of writing this article. We find that Haraway's stance resonates with the methodological tensions that arise in creative and embodied research practices such as drawing, as these methods so often resist the neatness of conventional academic inquiry, producing ambiguity, discomfort, and a sense of vulnerability among participants, and researchers. What do we do, and how do we think about what we do, when participants show reluctance, cannot see the value of drawing, or simply refuse to draw? Rather than interpreting the discomfort arising from drawing in research as a methodological problem to be resolved, we are following Haraway by proposing it as a site for staying with the trouble. Drawing might move the boundary between researcher, participants and material, between knowledge and feeling, between subject and method. To draw is much more than an act of representation. It is an opening to be affected, to respond, and to stay with what emerges, the unfinished, uncertain, all in process. We argue that the discomfort experienced when engaging in these practices and inviting others to do the same calls for *response-ability*. It urges us,

as researchers, to remain attentive to the relations and frictions that shape knowledge-making in ways that are both kind and courageous. It is also a call to continue daring to draw within academia. In our discussions, we have found that developing a practice for enduring methodological discomfort connected to drawing can help us acknowledge research as a situated, entangled, and material act of shared knowledge creation.

We will present two examples from our own practices, illustrating our approaches as inspiration, serving as entry points to investigate the following research question:

> *How can researchers cultivate a practice for enduring the methodological discomfort that arises in creative and embodied research methods such as drawing, and how might this very discomfort generate new forms of insight within academic practice?*

In this paper, we explore two modes of employing drawing as part of a research practice, both situated within a broader interest in artful and ethically attentive inquiry, and both sharing an interest in aesthetics as a site of reflection, relation, and co-creation, but unfolding very differently, and posing different kinds of discomfort.

The first example engages drawing as *an observational tool*, where participants were introduced to drawing techniques and encouraged to use drawing in their own exploratory research processes. Here, drawing becomes a mode of attentiveness, a way of sharpening observation and reflecting on phenomena as they unfold.

The second example engages drawing as *a dialogical tool*, where the researcher ends up drawing for the participants, rather than insisting that the participants draw. Here, drawing becomes a situated and responsive gesture that opens a space of relational engagement and critical expression.

A participatory approach to action research

In this paper, we reflect on our own practices as researchers introducing drawings to different participant groups. Thus, we are inspired by action research where we reflect on our own learning and view each other as critical learning partners (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002). Architect and educational researcher, Donald Schön (1992) discusses the structure of professional landscapes and their distinct epistemologies. He describes a "high ground" that prioritizes technical rationality and "swampy lowlands" that value intuitive, practical knowledge (p.120). Schön advocates for a re-evaluation of what is

considered scholarship, suggesting that a pragmatic approach to research addressing everyday life issues should be as esteemed as traditional academic work. This perspective is incorporated in action research, a method of investigating one's own practice to develop personal and context-sensitive knowledge (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002). From a pragmatic epistemology, we do not view knowledge as an objective reflection of reality, but as something constructed through active, ongoing engagement with our environment (Dewey, 1938).

With a background as an architect, Schön (1983) argues that all professions could benefit from thinking like a designer, where reflective practices are privileged over technical rationality. Other researchers have proposed that visual materials have a productive role, when involving participants in shared conversations about a topic. For example, Hansen and Dalsgaard (2012) emphasise how visual materials can empower participants and drive conversations in participatory workshops. Inspired by these pragmatic perspectives, we as researchers go into a conversation with the participants and the situation at hand through the use of drawings. Through concrete practical examples from the "swampy lowlands", we will reflect on how we as researchers took actions in these situations.

To use artistic expression in action research is not new (e.g. Jokela et al., 2015; Clarke and Bautista, 2017). For example, Julie Borup Jensen suggests that drawing on arts have the potential to emphasise senses and body in action research which is an intention that we share; to introduce artistic ways of working in action research to support participatory approaches that empower participants (Jensen, 2022, p. 28-29). Here, it is relevant to view all actors in a given change process as participants including the researchers (Jensen, 2022, p.37). Thus, we see ourselves as part of the learning community when using drawings in research processes. Within the field of action research, our aim is to contribute to the agenda of expanding the use of artistic expression by providing empirically grounded research. This is particularly focused on staying with the trouble of tensions related to the use of drawing as a research practice.

Theoretical framework: Drawing as a research practice

In this section, we will unfold our different sources of inspiration, when working with drawing as a research practice. Much in line with our argument, design anthropologist

Sarah Pink argues that there is no recipe when using visual methods as part of a research project while methods are developed and actualized *through* the process (Pink, 2007, p. 5). Likewise, Leavyf expresses how arts-based researchers do not discover new research tools, they *carve* them (Leavy, 2020, p. 3). Considering this, we perceive our research approaches as trying out and combining inspiration from different scholars who - as we do - experiment with using drawing in their research.

Artist and ethnographer Andrew Causey (2017) has combined his work as an anthropologist with his passion for drawing when doing ethnographic fieldwork. In his book "Drawn to see" (2017), Causey does not intend to give a strict recipe for how to use drawing as an ethnographic research approach. Rather his book is an attempt to invite researchers and students to use drawings as "another set of options for collecting, recording and presenting ethnographic information" (Causey, 2017, p. 3). Through the use of drawing, we can slow down the pace, be curious, be present and use all senses in our observations (Causey, 2017, pp. 19–22). Causey states that he uses drawing to strengthen his ability to write about his observations afterwards, as he explains: "drawing the scene enlivened my ability to write about it" (Causey, 2017, p. 7).

Likewise, Tim Ingold argues for a strong connection between the act of drawing and writing in research (Ingold, 2016). Ingold emphasizes how the use of drawing in research can facilitate what he calls 'an entanglement of threads' (2015) where the research is viewed as a complex meshwork of relationality in which drawing becomes a method for revealing subtle aspects which may not be revealed using more traditional research approaches. Thus, Ingold argues that the field itself must be 'redrawn' (Ingold, 2011) and that drawing should not simply be reduced to illustration but be an essential mode of research itself. Ingold's 'lineology' (Ingold, 2015) unfolds the concept of lines as both literal marks made with pencils and the embodied movements of observation, aligning drawing with the act of wayfaring, where understanding is gained through continuous and attentive movement. According to Ingold, lines are not static but dynamic trails that meet in interweavements or 'meshwork' capturing the unfolding of relationships that might otherwise be eluded in more conventional research methods. Based on Ingold's work, we see drawing as having a significant role in navigating and making visible the entanglements of social life, where knowledge emerges from ongoing lived interaction.

Both Ingold and Causey address that applying drawing in research is not an easy task while the approach challenges academic traditions which resonate much with our experiences. Although Causey passionately advocates for drawing to be recognized as a valid method of conducting fieldwork, he still views it as a 'risk of dare' because it challenges the established traditions in ethnography that rely on writing thick descriptions (Causey, 2017, p. 29). Nevertheless, Causey describes it as a fascinating risk when we incorporate drawing as an essential part of ethnographic fieldwork. He elaborates: "You are, in fact daring yourself to perceive the world in a new way when doing your ethnographic research, and in taking that small risk you might find out something unexpected, remarkable, or even revolutionary" (Causey, 2017, p. 49). While both Ingold and Causey advocate for drawing as a means to explore a field, they are less clear about how varying the identity of the draughtsperson can reveal new insights into the potential of drawing practices, depending on the context in which they are conducted. In our empirical examples, we will discuss the shifting roles of the draughtsperson and how moments of hesitation and resistance to draw can be approached. In our examples, we use the term *'draughtsperson'* to refer to the individual who holds the pen during the drawing process.

As mentioned in the introduction, we have experienced how drawing per se can be challenging and 'a risk of dare' both for us as researchers and also for the participants who we involve in the research processes. In the following section, we draw on insights from graphic facilitation, when involving drawing as a research practice in academia aiming to understand the functions that the act of drawing may provide for research.

The role of the researcher using drawings

From an action research perspective, learning is rooted in experience, and reflection on action is central to the methodology (Schön, 1992). As McNiff and Whitehead (2002, p.18) note, such reflection only makes sense when practice is understood relationally as a dialogic process where participants express and shape their own stories. In our work, we are concerned with how to facilitate such reflective spaces. Here, we draw inspiration from the field of graphic facilitation, which helps us frame the researcher as a facilitator of knowledge creation through drawing.

Graphic facilitation involves using simple, analogue drawing techniques to visually structure processes and content (Frank & Madsen, 2020, p.34). Typically,

facilitators use large sheets of paper to capture conversations, incorporating participants' contributions to support shared understanding (e.g., Sibbet, 2001; Tyler et al., 2005). As Agerbeck (2012) emphasizes, the practice combines listening, thinking, and drawing in equal measures. Although not framed as an artistic method, it shares the craft of drawing with artistic practice without focusing on aesthetics (Valenza & Adkins, 2009). Agerbeck (2016, p.9) reminds us that we often "confuse an action anyone can partake in (drawing) with the narrowly defined role (artist)," urging us to overcome the inner critic that says: "we cannot draw". In our experiences, this confusion impacts how participants approach the act of drawing with feelings of disbelief, discomfort and insecurities which we address in the section "*Presentation and discussion of two empirical examples*". Thus, our two empirical examples explore how researchers can engage with drawing in different ways depending on the context and participants' different comfort levels in relation to drawing.

In the first example, the researcher creates a space where students in higher education are invited to use drawing in their own research. Initial discomfort is addressed by introducing drawing as a craft, something to be practiced and applied over time. Drawing becomes a tool for fieldwork, problem identification, and ideation, supporting collaborative design processes. Based on our own experiments (e.g., Hautopp and Buhl, 2021; Hautopp, 2022), we have explored how placing participants as active draughtspersons can foster collective drawing and discussion. This includes distributing the pens and thus the power to define (Nielsen et al., 2016, p.220) invite non-designers to use drawing as a research practice.

In the second example, the researcher encounters participants' reluctance to draw and responds by taking up the pen. Here, drawing is not about participant's own visual expression but about creating shared attention and dialogue. We understand this as "staying with the trouble," engaging in situ with the discomfort and complexity rather than seeking to resolve it. Drawing becomes a relational practice of response-ability, where meaning emerges through attentiveness and exchange between the researcher and participants. Rather than a methodological flaw, the asymmetry of the researcher drawing on behalf of others becomes a site of generative friction, opening the possibility of agency through ambiguity and relational entanglement.

In both examples, drawing is not a neutral method but a situated and shared practice that demands curiosity, care, and accountability. The examples illustrate different

ways of engaging participants and navigating discomfort - both for researchers and participants - when drawing is used in research.

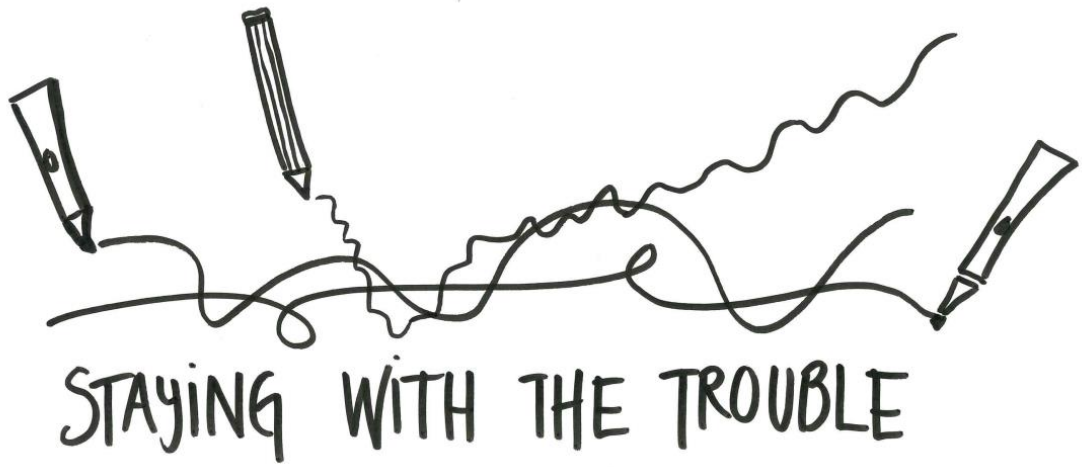


Figure 1: Illustration of 'staying with the trouble' using different lines and pens (made by Author 1).

Presentation and analysis of two empirical examples

In this section we will present and analyse two examples of using drawing as a method in research practice.

Example 1: Drawing as an observational tool, where participants use drawing in their own exploratory processes

The context of this example is higher education within the humanities in Denmark. Based as researchers at Aalborg University, Denmark, we work from a Problem-based Learning perspective which also demands a strong coherence between research and teaching (Holgaard, 2021, p.19). This means that aside from researching, we are also teaching students to acquire academic skills within problem identification, problem solving and critical thinking (e.g. Savin-Baden, 2003). Research-based teaching can be said to be the university's central task when it comes to introducing students to academic work methods. Dohn & Dolin (2015) emphasize that the university is a place where research is practiced and where students learn by participating in these environments. The authors further point out: "Students must learn to take part in the scientific processes, not just be taught" (Dohn & Dolin, 2015, p.43). Here, it is important that students themselves have the opportunity to acquire the methods within research. One way to practice research-

based teaching, where students acquire skills within different methods, is for the researchers to present methods that they themselves use in their own research, and thereby inspiring students to try out the methods in their own projects (Dohn & Dolin, 2015, p.55). Thus, the first example revolves around a research project in higher education, where bachelor students were invited to take the role as designers developing a communication design for a museum (Hautopp, 2021). The aim of this research project was to position the students as active drawers at the beginning of their projects when doing ethnographic field notes. Hereby, we introduce students to take part in the research method we use in our own research (Dohn and Dolin, 2015). Before visiting the museum, the researcher facilitated a short introduction to graphic facilitation and simple drawing techniques for the students to be equipped for using drawing as part of their fieldwork. The overall goal of the introduction was to invite the students into a safe space, where they 'dare to draw' (Causey, 2017) as a part of their group processes. Through an introduction of simple drawing techniques, the researcher aimed at providing tools and techniques for the students to create a shared space for discussing future observations at the museum. In the beginning of the introduction, some students were surprised and puzzled to see pens and paper on their tables entering the room while others stated that 'drawing was out of their comfort zone' or that 'they have not been drawing since elementary school'. The students' utterances indicate that they felt a kind of discomfort and ambiguity (Haraway, 2016) entering a learning space, where they were expected to draw.

To meet the students' insecurities and puzzlement, the researcher began the session with some simple 'warm-up' exercises with the purpose of making the students focus on the bodily act and process of drawing and not the final product. For example, an exercise would be to ask students to draw doodles with their eyes closed and afterwards elaborate on what - often fantasy animals - appear from their initial curlicues. Furthermore, the practice of simple basic shapes like a square, circle and triangle can be a starting point for observing patterns on a walk around the university campus. To break with our inner critic (Agerbeck, 2012), drawing exercises with a limited time frame can be useful as we do not have time to be critical of our own drawing skills as we simply must get things down on paper to finish the task. In the introduction session, materials such as pens and paper for all students are evident for the drawing exercises to take place. If there is not enough equipment for everyone, the students can tend to distribute the

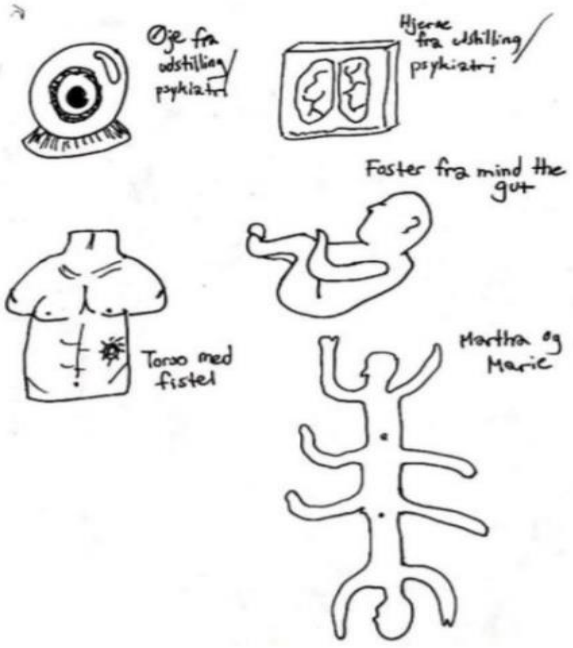
responsibility of drawing to 1-2 students in the group which is not appropriate if the intention is for all to get engaged in the shared materialization and discussion. Moreover, the researcher used a document camera to project the analogue drawing introduction on a big screen for everyone to follow. When the researcher used a document camera for the students to follow the hand drawing, it can be argued that the act of drawing can slow the pace down (Frank and Madsen, 2020). This will encourage the students to be present and curious and use all senses in their observations (Causey, 2017). Inspired by graphic facilitation, the simple drawing techniques are not to be viewed as a strict recipe to follow, but as a starting point for the students to develop their own personal style (Qvist-Sørensen and Baastrup, 2019). This introduction is one example of a variety of drawing techniques which can pave the way for non-designers to consider using drawing as a research method.

Across groups and courses, it has been evident that the students often are surprised when they are presented with drawing as a method in research practice as they do not connect drawing with work processes in academia (Hautopp, 2022). After the introduction to simple drawing techniques, some student groups have reflected on the method: "I think it helped a lot that we had a small introduction to graphic facilitation (…) if we had not had this introduction, I expect we would not have known where to begin." Likewise, a student group expressed: "Before the workshop, we were probably a bit prejudiced, because I think many of us had the impression that we cannot draw. But then we had the introduction, and we could see how we could use simple drawings" (Hautopp, 2023, p.190). We argue that these statements point towards the relevance of hands-on introduction of drawing techniques to help the students to have some acquaintance with the act of drawing as a steppingstone in daring to draw in academia.

The researcher has introduced drawing as a method in research practice for students in this module for the last 10 years. In the first couple of years, the researcher felt compelled to show neat and 'finished' drawings when presenting examples from her fieldwork. In retrospect, it was a way to confirm the validity of the method mirrored in the organized drawings. However, reflecting on the purpose of using drawing as a method to document messiness and movements (Ingold, 2015; Haraway, 2016) the teacher has started showing rapid and unfinished drawings from the field. The aim was for the students not to focus on aesthetics, but consider 'daring to draw' (Causey, 2017) as part

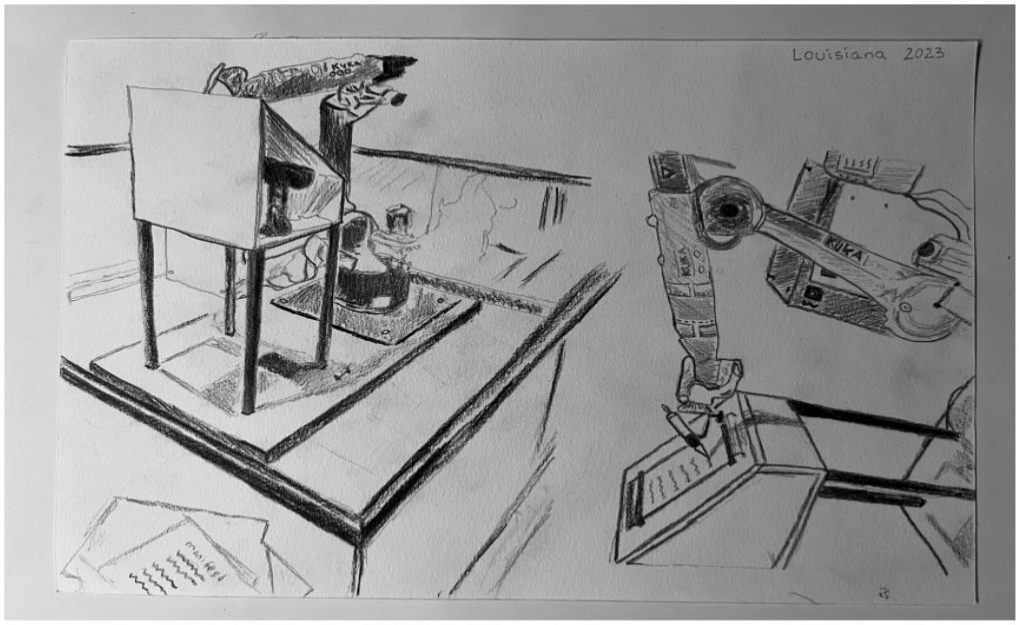
of their fieldwork in line with writing. In this perspective, the aim is not for the students to avoid feelings of discomfort, but an invitation to embrace the complex reactions (Haraway, 2016) that they are confronted with when using drawing as a research method.

After the initial drawing exercises, students are invited to use *drawing as an observational tool*, when visiting different museums as part of their context investigation for their group projects. At the museums, students were observing and drawing objects to gain inspiration for their future design development (see examples of students' drawings figure 2 and 3).



Billede 2: Tegning fra feltbesøg på MM

Figure 2: Student drawing from ethnographic field work at Medical Museion, Copenhagen, 2020. Credit: Rasmus Otto-Sidelmann (Hautopp, 2022, p.70).



Billede 1: Sketch af robot fra Louisiana

Figure 3: Student drawing from ethnographic field work at Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, 2023. Credit: Vanessa Lazib Baladi

In figure 3, the students had observed interactive elements performed by a robot in an exhibition about generative AI. They further reflected on the role of using drawings as part of documenting their observations: "It has allowed us to notice details in the observed objects and to document our experiences with the aim of being able to look back on them later in the project work". In line with Causey (2017), it can be argued that the act of drawing provided the students with another option for noticing details and presenting their observations in new ways. From their initial questioning of drawing's academic value and early discomfort, the introduction of drawing techniques and repeated practice appear to have supported their overall evaluation of the tool as applicable to their research processes.

Example 2: Drawing in dialogue, navigating research tensions and methodological discomfort through relational response

This example stems from an organizational field study of an outreach placement project in Denmark, where the research approach was inspired by art-based methods framed as *care aesthetics* (Thomson, 2022). Care aesthetics entails a practice of aesthetic carefulness in which well-being is central to the process of artmaking. In line with Thomson's (2022) notion of "artful care and careful art," drawing was introduced not

merely as a means of data collection but as a caring engagement, and as an act attentive to the transformative potential of research situations. The researcher's intention was to create space for shared engagement and dialogue attuned to participants' interests, and to co-create drawn investigations of their experiences and practices. Drawing, as a bridge between aesthetics and ethics, was meant to enable both researcher and participants to explore not only the enactment of care but also the ways in which the act of drawing itself might embody care, becoming a medium for connection, reflection, and transformation.

The researcher aimed at facilitating a dialogue around the outreach placement project involving potential participants for the project as well as consultants. Initially, grounded in the researcher's aim to engage participants through co-productive knowledge creation, participants were invited to express themselves with a "visual voice" through drawing (Ingold, 2011; Causey, 2017), contributing to a process oriented around participation and care. Ideally, the drawing activities would be guided by the participants' own interests, providing a shared point of departure for dialogue. However, early interactions with participants prompted a shift in the research design, highlighting the importance of the researcher's presence, listening and observing, rather than imposing a pre-developed method of data collection. Despite good intentions of creating space for expression, the researcher's agenda was effectively "messed up."

For example, Hannibal, a participant, initially dismissed drawing, noting he had not engaged in these kinds of activities since childhood. Instead, he expressed interest in non-normative aesthetic practices such as graffiti and self-made tattoos. Rather than insisting on Hannibal participating through the creation of his own drawing, the researcher chose to sketch Hannibal's tattoos and his hand while he displayed graffiti images on his phone (See figure 4, 5, and 6). This, as a way of remaining attuned to the moment, cultivating openness, and keeping the research space receptive by reframing Hannibal's previous aesthetic practices as valid forms of drawing.

Figures 4, 5, and 6: Ethnographic sketches produced in situ during Author 2's interaction with Hannibal, capturing the dialogical entanglement through shared lines and gestures.

During the drawing-dialogue, Hannibal brought forward his experiences with non-normative behaviour, subtly expressing an interest in questioning rules, experimenting with boundaries, and voicing matters that are often silenced. The act of recognizing Hannibal's ways of drawing became a way for the researcher to "stay with the 'trouble". Instead of rejecting or correcting these practices as deviant, the researcher remained with the tension they created in the situation, by letting the practices unfold as meaningful aesthetic expressions in a careful way. The researcher's approach of staying with the troublesome aspects of Hannibal saying no and instead inviting the researcher to engage with his (other) forms of drawing became a generative force that sustained dialogical exchange.

Hannibal responded by shifting from withdrawal to a subtle engagement, using irony and humour to reposition himself within the encounter. In doing so, he simultaneously performed an institutional critique and tested whether the situation could allow for a more democratic dialogue. Although he remained uninterested in the proposed drawing-activity, the dialogue prompted him to reflect on his role in the project and made him hint at a critique of the institutional language framing the project. These reflections reappeared in a later group dialogue, where Hannibal in response to the word "citizens," whispered "Inmates," and later asked the group, "So what are we then?" Hannibal's re-introduction of "trouble" into the collective conversation, challenging the roles and

positions of all participants became a new way for Hannibal to contribute to the project and a possibility for him to pose questions and think more deeply about his own role and aspirations.

The shift from hesitance to courage not only empowered Hannibal but also revealed insights for the consultants in the project. The consultants, who had previously viewed Hannibal as more of a going-along person, were presented with new knowledge about his need for also being allowed to set up his own boundaries and to engage in more sensitive dialogues. This discovery allowed them to see Hannibal's potential contribution to the project in a new light, recognizing that his need for reflection should be considered in their interactions with him. Here, the act of drawing provided a new pathway for engagement with participants in the project whose interests or resistances might not otherwise have been acknowledged. Furthermore, the drawing facilitated dialogue also seeded later meta-reflections between the consultants and the researcher about the shifting roles and positionalities at play in the project more generally.

The outplay of this *critical incident* (Tidwell et al., 2020) underscored the importance of attending to the identities and hierarchies that shape what goes on in both research and in practice, and when they entangle. At the same time, it showed the potential of art-based methods as openings that can validate ambivalence, invite critique, and make room for voices, such as Hannibal's ironic interventions, to emerge in ways the researcher could not have anticipated. By 'keeping the pen' (Kordovsky & Pallesen, 2024; Kordovsky & Pallesen, in review) the researcher became an integral part of the encounter itself, facilitating a process of dialogue and discovery of Hannibal's need for reflection and discussion of his role as a participant in the project. As a dialogical tool, drawing exceeded the production of images. It became a mode of *withness-thinking* that foregrounded the present encounter over preconception (Kordovsky, 2024), attuning all involved to relational dynamics and revealing capacities otherwise unseen in the project (Kordovsky & Pallesen, in review).

Subtle aspects of participation, such as processes of 'finding a voice,' 'saying no,' and 'being acknowledged,' along with the ongoing negotiations of becoming part of a project and subjectifying oneself within it, were revealed through an entanglement of threads, where the research design emerged as a meshwork of relationality and shared responsibility (Ingold, 2015). This entanglement was not static but iterative, shaped by

the researcher's continuous relational engagement: attuning to participants, listening closely, and allowing meaning to be co-created through the act of drawing (Agerbeck, 2012). Within this process, important methodological insights surfaced about how to attune practice to the situation, particularly in negotiating who assumes the role of draughtsperson, and in recognising the moments when such shifts become generative for the unfolding dialogue.

From a reflective practice perspective (Schön, 1992), it can be argued that by allowing discomfort, irony, and refusal to become part of the inquiry, drawing evolved from being merely a method for accessing the field into an opening toward new possibilities. In this sense, the encounter points to the need for a methodological stance that embraces Schön's "swampy lowlands" of practice: those zones where intuitive, embodied, and situated knowledge emerges beyond the neatness of conventional inquiry.

Methodological awareness and concluding reflections

In this paper, we have explored how drawing unfolds as a situated and collective research practice, entangled with materials, participants, and contexts. Through two empirical examples, we have shown how drawing can be organised in different ways: either by inviting participants to draw, gradually developing drawing as a craft, or by the researcher assuming the role of draughtsperson, using drawing to foster shared attention, acknowledgement and deeper dialogue.

These examples reveal the shifting roles of the researcher as draughtsperson, facilitator and role model, navigating discomfort, hesitation, refusal and relational dynamics across contexts. In this perspective, drawing becomes more than a research method. It is a material and ethical practice of *response-ability* (Haraway, 2016), where meaning emerges through attentiveness, dialogue, and co-creation. The asymmetry of drawing on behalf of others is not a methodological flaw, but rather a site-specific generative friction—an invitation to stay with the trouble rather than resolve it.

We have proposed a context-sensitive approach that recognises drawing as a flexible and multifaceted research method. In higher education, drawing can be cultivated over time to support observational and reflective practices. In other organisational settings, drawing may serve as a dialogic tool, allowing participants to contribute without needing to draw themselves.

As demonstrated in the two empirical examples, the use of drawing opens both methodological reflections on what this approach can contribute to participants' own research practices (example 1), and insights into areas of interest that might not have emerged through more traditional interview formats (example 2). A central consideration when using drawing as a research method is the researcher's role as a facilitator of situated knowledge creation and responsiveness to the situation at hand. The examples highlight the need for researchers to reflect on their role in drawing practices:

- What is the purpose of drawing in this context? Is it observational, dialogic, or expressive?
- How should I attune to the situation and participants? When is it appropriate to invite participants to draw, to draw on behalf of others, or to shift roles?

It is also important to emphasise that drawing is not always suitable in research situations. Researchers must remain responsive to participants' reactions (Schön, 1992) - such as resistance or discomfort - adjusting their approach with care and reflexivity. By embracing drawing as a process-oriented and relational practice, we hope to inspire action researchers to explore its potential in new contexts and contribute to a growing tradition of using drawing in collective inquiry processes.

Returning to our research question: *How can researchers cultivate a practice for enduring the methodological discomfort that arises in creative and embodied research methods such as drawing, and how might this very discomfort generate new forms of insight within academic practice?*, the two examples presented in this article offer situated responses.

They show that enduring discomfort is not merely a matter of tolerance, but of cultivating attentiveness, responsiveness, and shared engagement. Whether through inviting participants to draw or drawing on their behalf, the researcher's role becomes one of navigating relational tensions. These tensions, rather than being obstacles, become common ground for insight, revealing aspects of practice, relation and knowledge-making that might otherwise remain hidden.

References

Agerbeck, B. (2012). *The graphic facilitator's guide: How to use your listening, thinking & drawing skills to make meaning*. Chicago: Loosetooth.

Agerbeck, B. (2016). Making room for Making: In praise of imperfect drawings and the humans who make them. In: Agerbeck, B. Bird, K. Braad, S. and Sherpard, J. (eds.) *Drawn Together Through Visual Practice*. U.S.A.: Visual Practice Publishing, p. 251 – 270.

Causey, A. (2017). *Drawn to see: Drawing as an ethnographic method.* University of Toronto Press.

Clarke, A., & Bautista, D. (2017). Critical reflection and arts-based action research for the educator self. *The Canadian Journal of Action Research*, *18*(1), 52-70.

Dewey, J. (1938). *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry.* New York: Holt, Rinehardt and Winston.

Douglas-Jones, R. (2021). Drawing as analysis: Thinking in images, writing in words. In *Experimenting with Ethnography: A Companion to Analysis* (pp. 105-119). Duke University Press.

Dohn, N.B. & Dolin, J. (2015). Research-based teaching. I: Rienecker, L., Jørgensen, P. S., Dolin, J. & Ingerslev, G. H. (eds) *University Teaching and Learning*. Samfundslitteratur, p. 43-63.

Frank, N. and Madsen, A. (2020). *Draw to learn. A guide for teachers and leaders who aspire to create curious and collaborative learning cultures using Graphic Facilitation*. Copenhagen: Tools for Schools.

Hansen, N. B., & Dalsgaard P. (2012). The productive role of material design artefacts in participatory design events. In: *Proceedings of the 7th Nordic Conference on Human-Computer Interaction: Making Sense through Design* (NordiCHI '12), 665–674. New York: ACM. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1145/2399016.2399117

Haraway, D. J. (2016). *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press.

Hautopp, H. (2021). The process from teaching to assessing students' designerly and creative ways of working in higher education. In *Proceedings of ICERI2021 Conference 8th-9th November 2021* (s. 6906-6924). International Association of Technology, Education and Development (IATED).

Hautopp, H. (2022). *Drawing Connections – An Exploration of Graphic and Visual Facilitation in Organisational and Higher Educational Contexts*. Aalborg Universitetsforlag.

Hautopp, H. (2023). Combining graphic facilitation and animation-based sketching in higher education. *Drawing: Research, Theory, Practice*, *8*(2), 179-199.

Hautopp, H., & Buhl, M. (2021). Drawing as an Academic Dialogue Tool for Developing Digital Learning Designs in Higher Education. *Electronic Journal of E-Learning*, *19*(5), 321-335.

Holgaard, J. E., Ryberg, T., Stegeager, N., Stentoft, D., & Thomassen, A. O. (2021). *An Introduction to Problem-Based Learning in Higher Education*. Samfundslitteratur.

Ingold, T. (Ed.). (2011). *Redrawing anthropology: Materials, movements, lines*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.

Ingold, T., 2015. *The Life of Lines*. London: Routledge.

Ingold, T. (2016). *Lines: A brief history*. Routledge.

Jensen, J. B. (2022). Artfulness as a dimension of professional practice in organizations and action research: Acknowledging sensory-aware and embodied attunement in professional organizations. *Action Research*, *20*(1), 27-43.

Jokela, T., Hiltunen, M., & Härkönen, E. (2015). Art-based action research–participatory art for the north. *International Journal of Education through Art*, *11*(3), 433-448.

Kordovsky, J. (2024). Rummaging Around in a Handbag of Caring Research: On Searching for a Pencil and a Moral Compass. *Qualitative Studies, 9*(1), 136-151.

Kordovsky, J., & Pallesen, E. (2024). Drawing as a caring way of practicing research: towards a methodological framework. In *EGOS colloquium 2024: Crossroads for organizations*.

Kordovsky, J., & Pallesen, E. (in review). Drawing as a caring way of practicing research. *Qualitative Inquiry*.

LaBoskey, V. K. (2004). The methodology of self-study and its theoretical underpinnings. In *International handbook of self-study of teaching and teacher education practices* (pp. 817-869). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.

Leavy, P. (2020). *Method Meets Arts: Arts-Based Research Practice*. (3rd ed.). Guilford Publication.

McNiff, J. & Whitehead, J. (2002). *Action Research: Principles and Practice.* (2nd ed.). Routledge Falmer.

Nielsen, E., Søndergaard, K., Nielsen, I., & Moltke, H. (2016). *Grafisk Facilitering – når ord og billeder mødes*. København, Denmark: Dansk Psykologi Forlag.

Pink, S. (2007). *Doing Visual Ethnography*. (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Pinnegar, S. (1998). Introduction to Part II: Methodological perspectives. In M. L. Hamilton (Ed.), *Reconceptualizing teaching practice: Self-Study in teacher education* (pp. 31–33). London: Falmer Press.

Qvist-Sorensen, O., & Baastrup, L. (2019). *Visual collaboration: A powerful toolkit for improving meetings, projects, and processes*. John Wiley & Sons.

Rohwedder, A.-B., Møller, B. L. & Kordovsky, J., (2024). Forsker-praktiker-samarbejde som et ligeværdigt videns- og læringsrum: Et didaktisk anliggende. Nordic *Journal of Vocational Education and Training 14* (3), 114-137.

Rose, G. (2016). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials*. SAGE.

Savin-Baden, M. (2003). *Facilitating problem-based learning – Illuminating perspectives. Philadelphia*, PA: McGraw-Hill Education.

Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. London, UK: Temple.

Schön, D. A. (1992). The theory of inquiry: Dewey's legacy to education. *Curriculum inquiry, 22*(2), 119- 139.

Sibbet, D. (2001). A graphic facilitation retrospective. Adapted from a Paper presented at the International Association of Facilitators: The Art and Mastery of Facilitation – Navigating the Future IAF Conference, 2001, May 16–20. Minnesota.

Thompson, J. (2022). *Care Aesthetics: For artful care and careful art*. Routledge.

Tidwell, D. L., & Jónsdóttir, S. R. (2020). Methods and tools of self-study. I J. Kitchen, A. Berry, S. M. Bullock, A. R. Crowe, M. Taylor, H. Guðjónsdóttir & L. Thomas (Eds.), *International handbook of self-study of teaching and teacher education practices* (pp. 377–426). Springer.

Tyler, C., Valek, L., & Rowland, R. (2005). Graphic facilitation and large-scale interventions. Supporting dialogue between cultures at a global, multicultural, interfaith event. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, *41*(139), 139–152.

Valenza, C., & Adkins, J. (2009). Timelines understanding visual thinking: The history and future of graphic facilitation. *Interactions*, *16*(4), 38-43.

About the authors:

Heidi Hautopp is an Associate Professor at Aalborg University, Denmark. Her research interests revolve around how drawing and visual methods can be used as idea generating and dialogue tools across different academic disciplines. She holds a PhD in graphic facilitation and design processes, where among others she has explored the use of drawing in research processes. She is a member of the research Center Visual studies and Learning Design (ViLD) and teaches in the Nordic Master's Programme in Visual Studies and Art Education (NoVA).

Julie Kordovsky is a PhD candidate in organisational studies at Aalborg University, Denmark. Her PhD, part of the HumVelux-funded DELTAG project at University College Absalon, investigates the organisational conditions of employment programmes for people not in employment, education, or training, and their potential entry into the elderly care sector. Through participatory methods and visual ethnography, she examines these initiatives as organisational assemblages, sites where policies, everyday practices, materialities, and affective relations converge. Her research sits at the intersection of organisational learning, care ethics, and process-oriented approaches to public welfare, contributing to rethinking how public organisations learn to care amid contemporary welfare transformations.

Mie Buhl is a Professor at Aalborg University, Denmark. She is director of the research Center Visual studies and Learning Design (ViLD) and the cofounder of the Nordic Master's Programme in Visual Studies and Art Education (NoVA) which is a co-taught collaboration between Aalborg and Aalto Universities facilitated by a hybrid and on-line learning format. Her research centres on visual learning practices and knowledge building from an interdisciplinary perspective, particularly in relation to the impact of digital technology and digital exclusion/inclusion dynamics.