

# Researching research affects: in-between different research positions

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## Abstract

A significant amount of research has highlighted the different ontological and epistemological dimensions of insider and outsider research positions. In the field of education, this topic could benefit from more research. In this study, three researchers and former early childhood centre directors discussed their own research positions in a completed research project. Based on field notes from following the daily work of the centre leaders – positions the researchers formally held themselves – it is illustrated that the research affects continued to flow after the project had ended, raising new questions about how specific situations and the data had been handled. This study, a folding, unfolding and re-folding of data, highlights the ethical considerations actualised in the movements between research positions. The movements between research positions are understood as a source of tension that can produce affects, becomings and data with the ability to question given positions and established knowledge.

## Keywords

Deleuze, ethics, affects, folds, becomings, post qualitative inquiry, researcher positions, confabulative conversations, trust

## Exploring the insider–outsider debate

The aim of this article is to problematise the researcher position and the challenges that might arise whilst conducting research in one's field of experience. In this case, three

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former Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) directors who have conducted field research on four ECEC institutions were invited to contemplate the challenges that arise when simultaneously holding different research positions, conventionally often defined as insiders and outsiders.

Much research in the education field is produced by academics studying their own workplaces – for example, schools in which they hold or have held a position. According to Mercer (2007), this trend is propelled by a change in the master's and doctoral degree programmes, where, for example, part-time studies are offered, thus making it possible to study whilst continuing to work at one's regular job. This might be the case in the field of education as well as other fields, such as the health sciences and public administration. However, Mercer (2007) also points out that even if much insider research is being produced in the education field, there is little methodological literature problematising it within the discipline. Therefore, more research on this topic is needed. According to the literature review conducted by Mercer (2007), in many other disciplines, the debate on the insider/outsider dichotomy seems to be much more prevalent. Labaree (2002) attempts to explore the 'hidden' methodological and ethical dilemmas in the insider participant observers' research in a higher education context. Referring to Merton, Labaree (2002) notes that the insider or outsider debate is primarily an issue of access. The insider researcher can either gain access to research areas that the outsider cannot or is able to save time by arranging the same level of access. There is also an epistemological dimension, as the insider might have access to another kind of knowledge with greater possibilities to perceive, for example, not always verbally communicated or implicit data from the field (as shown e.g. in Chammas, 2020). Additionally, one characteristic of the insider position is a common ground, such as language, workplace culture, identity or experience, which is shared by the participants and the researcher (Asselin, 2003). However, Labaree (2002) points out that the methodological and ethical dilemmas might be hidden from the insider because he/she is assumed to have an advantage in the field; because that advantage is solely the result of a subjective assumption based on one's biography, this might not actually lead to better access. Thus, it is not evident that the researcher's understanding of her or his own background constitutes a shared familiarity with the study's participants (Griffith, 1998). Pitman (2002: 285) describes this as an 'illusion of sameness'.

Linguistically, the insider position is often understood in contrast to the outsider, which is a position closely linked to the ideal of attaining objective knowledge. The outsider, the 'professional stranger', is 'unrestricted by prejudged practice and theory' (Kauffman, 1994: 180). Bearing this reasoning in mind, and according to the ideal of objectivity, professional strangers are expected to raise questions and define problems that are unlikely to be highlighted by insiders who will make different kinds of assumptions (Griffith, 1998). The ideal of objectivity is often present in science; however, it can be argued that the insider position is somewhat romanticised in the field of the humanities and social sciences, which are research disciplines in which qualitative methods are commonly used. Both positions offer advantages and disadvantages as well as ethical dilemmas. Breen (2007) maintains that research conducted from an insider position, such as in community-based applied research, lacks practically useful ethical guidelines. However, Johansson and Hall (2019) point out that ethical questions raised in research from an insider position are difficult to address in accordance with pre-determined

guidelines, but must be dealt with in the specific context and according to the relations in the research event.

The insider and outsider positions claim to have different epistemological advantages from diverse methodological and theoretical standpoints (Griffith, 1998). However, the traditional understanding of the insider and outsider positions as complete opposites has been widely criticised for decades. First and foremost, the dichotomy is argued to be too simplistic. For example, Adler and Adler (1987) claim that the dichotomy between the researcher and participants is stronger in theory than in practice, and that the division has more of an impact on the analysis than the actual fieldwork. As Surra and Ridley (1991) maintain, these positions should not be understood as opposites; rather, they are points on a continuum. Surra and Ridley's (1991) continuum of interaction is divided into low and high levels of relationship. The observer role, striving to minimise the influence of subjectivity, has a low relationship level; the participating and interactive researcher is characterised by a high relationship level. This illustrates that there are positions in-between these oft-stipulated dichotomies. From their point of departure in research about adoption, Dwyer and Buckle (2009) show that a researcher can simultaneously hold insider and outsider positions because '... (h)olding membership in a group does not denote complete sameness within that group. Likewise, not being a member of a group does not denote complete difference' (2009: 60). Griffith (1998: 368) argues that qualitative research should be understood as a relation that is formed over time, and that the researcher is inescapably 'moving back and forth different boundaries'. Some of these boundaries are obvious, such as one's biography; others are negotiable and some arise during the research project. This is a brief description of the methodological, epistemological and ethical challenges that a researcher might face whilst conducting research as an 'insider'. Based on three empirical examples concerning different researcher positions and the philosophy of Deleuze (1988, 1993; Deleuze and Guattari, 2012), this article highlights what occurs in the movements beyond the dichotomy between insider and outsider.

## Re-orienting thoughts: finding methodological approaches

In recent years, the ideals inherent in both qualitative and quantitative research methods have been questioned through the rather un-monopolistic term post-qualitative inquiry, coined by St. Pierre (2011). Lather and St. Pierre (2013: 631) argue that it is important to question the limits of qualitative research:

At some point, we have to ask whether we have become so attached to our invention – qualitative research – that we have come to think it is real. Have we forgotten that we made it up? Could we just leave it behind and do/live something else?

Various epistemological and ontological ideals, and consequentially also research methods that have been taken for granted for decades in conventional humanistic research, have been questioned in what can be described as post-qualitative inquires, such as representation (MacLure, 2013), the writing process (St. Pierre, 1997), data (Jackson and Mazzei, 2013; Nordstrom, 2015; St. Pierre, 2013) and collaboration (Cannon and Cross, 2020). A common aspect of these studies, diversified and pluralistic as they are, is that

they focus on why research inquiry should be less about complying with handbooks and pre-defined lines of arguments, and more about experimenting, inventing new and other ways of thinking and conducting research to create different knowledge and create knowledge differently (St. Pierre, 2011). In referring to Deleuze, St. Pierre (2019: 2) writes that ‘concepts [are] not intended for application to lived human experience but for *re-orienting* thought’. Thus, post-qualitative research is about creating ways of re-orienting thoughts, and for being in/with the world.

Post-qualitative inquiry not only produces other ways of understanding the research process, but it also facilitates understanding the role of the researcher as something different from the established ideals in both conventional qualitative and quantitative research. In different ways, several scholars exemplify what is actualised when the researcher is no longer regarded as the prime and given impetus for the research, but instead is viewed as an agent intra-acting with data (Nordstrom, 2015; Somerville, 2016), participants (Wolfe, 2017), voices (Johansson, 2015), bodies (Fullagar, 2017) and so on. The components are entanglements that occur in what could be described as the research apparatus and its plane of immanence (Deleuze and Guattari, 2012) in which all the components are regarded as potentially equal and productive contributors in the research. Borrowing the term from Heimans (2016), this could be regarded as the *dis-position* of the researcher. Jokinen and Nordstrom (2020: 647) invent a *queer cyborg ethnographer*, which helps highlight ‘the productive queerness beyond existing conventions’. By staying in the trouble (Haraway, 2016) whilst being *different* rather than *the same*, it is possible to be an ethically and politically responsible researcher. Jokinen and Nordstrom (2020), Johansson and Hall (2019), St. Pierre (2017, 2019) and Ulmer (2017) all point to one important aspect: the aim of post-qualitative inquiry is not merely to criticise, but to be an ethically, socially and politically responsible researcher who challenges established structures not just for the research, but also in a broader sense, for social and environmental justice. This article is inspired by post-qualitative inquiry, and specifically the arguments that question the position of the researcher. However, as in many other studies, such as the one described by Johansson (2015), the study presented in this article undeniably contained elements of conventional qualitative research. Some of these elements are questioned and, arguably, dealt with ‘in line’ with the non-prescriptive yet principled and clear values at play in many examples of post-qualitative inquiries. Other elements entail a source of trouble; while they are messy and elusive (Haraway, 2016) and difficult to handle in accordance with the ambition of the study, effort has been made to address them. Lastly, the kinds of elements that effectively escape our attention are expressions of conventional qualitative humanistic methodology in which we are so well trained that it is normalised and taken for granted (Lather and St. Pierre, 2013; St. Pierre, 2019) (for further discussion, see, for example, Nordstrom’s (2018) introduction to anti-methodology). These elements are in play, but they might rather effectively escape the attention.

## **Working with theory: folding and unfolding data**

According to St. Pierre (2019: 4), methodology has to ‘[. . .] be invented, created differently each time, and one study called post qualitative will not look like another’. This

article aims at doing so by thinking *with* theory through plugging-in (Jackson and Mazzei, 2013) data from an already existing research project with the work of Deleuze (1988; 1993) and Deleuze and Guattari (2012) to produce new data and to produce data differently. When heterogenic components, such as theory, research data, researchers and so on, are plugged into each other, their qualities are transformed. They are re-organised and changed, and so are their abilities to produce data. The change in their productiveness makes the components different, initiating a process of folding, unfolding and refolding the data. As Deleuze (1993: 39) writes: '[t]he problem is not how to finish a fold, but how to continue it, to have it go through the ceiling, how to bring it to infinity'. By folding and unfolding the data, the '[. . .] light, chiaroscuro, the way the fold catches illumination and itself varies according to the hour and light of day' (Deleuze, 1993: 41), thus making data appear differently, in a different light and in a different time. Both time and space are important components for the fold because their temporal conditions produce light together, yet in different ways. In this project, the research participants were invited to plug-in with their own field notes and memories and the others' field notes and memories from a previously conducted study, which entails a continuing of the folding of data, of time, of space and so on, in order to 'have it go through the ceiling' (Deleuze, 1993: 39) – in this case by producing new data in a changed light.

In the theories of Deleuze and Guattari (2012), thresholds and positions in-between are important concepts, where, they maintain, '[. . .] the self is only a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities' (2012: 249). The self, or the researcher in this context, is not a stable position. Rather, it is a becoming between multiplicities, as for example the researcher and the director or leader. Thus, the multiplicities and the thresholds between create the possibilities to become-researcher, to become-leader and so on. Deleuze and Guattari (2012: 3) write that, to become something (a wolf, a hole or, as in this example, a researcher) ' . . . is to deterritorialize oneself following distinct but entangled lines'. This deterritorialisation implies a change in intensities, speeds and flows, which are not random; they are dependent upon the entangled lines between multiplicities. Being a researcher is not a position one inherits, nor is it a position to be owned. It is actualised in the tension between multiplicities, such as 'becoming-leader', 'becoming-wolf', 'becoming-participant' and so on. Therefore, the becomings are difficult to predict, as they cannot be governed by the self or by rationality. They open the possibility for the ontological flows and forces that already exist as un-actualised virtualities. In such a sense, 'affects are becomings' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2012: 256). Bodies are not defined by what they are, but by their ability to affect and to be affected (Deleuze, 1988), namely, to become something else. Affects are not personal, and they are not to be seen as representative of the characteristics of a body. Instead, they are impersonal, beyond words, and as O'Sullivan (2001: 126) writes, 'you cannot read affects, only experience them'. They are something that 'hits' you, leaving a trace, a bodily memory that possibly changes structures and behaviours. In that sense, affects are, as Deleuze and Guattari (2012) state, becomings.

Drawing on Deleuze and Spinoza (Deleuze, 1988), Johansson and Hall (2019) introduce an *ethic of becoming*, exemplified in relation to research ethics. They state: 'An ethic of becoming does not direct attention toward moments of stability, as universal ethics usually do, but toward situations of change, of becomings, and of new relations in

the research situation' (Johansson and Hall, 2019: 429). The ethics of becoming highlights the ethically challenging situations that often arise in (post) qualitative research, which are not informed or solved by predefined ethical guidelines or checklists. Rather, the situations demand that the researcher acts immediately, not exclusively, to what is written in the report to institutional review boards, but in relation to the participants, the research project, the physical room, expectations, professional as well as personal ideals, the voice recorder and so on. Bearing this reasoning in mind, Davies (2014: 740) writes: 'Ethics [. . .] requires being open in each moment to assess the impact of the research, the research instruments and the researcher as well as the intra-active effect of the research on the researcher – ontologically and epistemologically'. The 'reflexivity' that appears in the aftermath of challenging research situations should, according to Johansson and Hall (2019: 430), not be '[. . .] a question of judgment, but of production and creativity'. The research activity continues, and so do the becomings, the production of affects and the ethical considerations. Furthermore, this article presents several examples of the ethics of becoming, illustrating how the research affects continue to be affective, even months after the situation and research project have ended. In the following section, the first fold of data, based on the completed project, 'Leadership in Motion', will be presented. Thereafter, the second fold of data will be introduced, presenting the inquiry of the project that is the focus of this article, which is based on the events from the first fold.

### **First fold: Leadership in Motion**

The aim of the research project 'Leadership in Motion' was to study the reorganisation of the leadership teams in ECEC centres in a large municipality in Norway by interviewing and following the everyday activities of the leaders (Moe et al., 2018; Nissen et al., 2020). The project was a case study of leader teams for a total of nine weeks in four ECEC centres, amounting to 10 different buildings. This research project started with what is described as 'shadowing', an abductive method enabling the researcher to get close to events and encounters, as well as to the leader's comments and wonderings. Bøe et al. (2017) claim that shadowing is a productive and powerful method in the study of leadership, as it leaves space for the unpredictable and creates room to capture the constantly changing contexts symptomatic of the daily working lives of leaders. However, the research project also aimed to facilitate intra-actions (Lenz Taguchi, 2009) *between* researchers and leaders. This ambition had an implication for the positions of the researchers, who had the possibility to intra-act with the leaders and thus become more active than which is ordinarily suggested in research using 'shadowing' as a method. By following and intra-acting with the leaders in their everyday work, the researchers gained insight into important dimensions of the relations, improvisations and involvement of co-workers. The aim was to look for leadership actions and productions, paying attention to motions and flows, creating an opening for different gazes and voices. Whilst an objectivistic research method might be rather uncontroversial and ethically easy to carry out, due to pre-defined guidelines on how to act (or not act), research with a more active researcher actualises other ethical questions. When researchers are actively participating and intra-acting, their background and experience might become more important for the way they conduct their research.



## Different research positions

The three researchers in the abovementioned project all have extensive leadership experience in ECEC centres as directors and eventually as supervisors for leaders within such institutions. Additionally, the researchers are all trained within ECEC, they are familiar with the job of pedagogical leaders and directors, and they know the organisational cultures within ECEC centres. In recent decades, the researchers have been teaching within the field of leadership and supervision in ECEC education. However, more than a decade has passed since they actively worked within ECEC centres, and even if much of the organisational structures and leadership are recognisable, a lot is also different. The contextual preconditions have changed, and, arguably, the researchers have also changed, because their positions have shifted from being directors to being researchers and teachers in higher education. Consequently, the three researchers hold different research positions, and to a varying degree, they can, according to the earlier described dichotomies, be defined as both insiders and outsiders. In the second fold, which will be described in the next section, they will arguably possess yet another position: as research participants. As shown, the research project that constitutes this article's first fold followed a rather traditional design. However, this project has produced research affects long after it formally ended. Those research affects constitute the points of departure for the conversations held between the research participants and a researcher unaffiliated with the first project, as described in the second fold, which is folded into the first fold.

## Second fold: producing research affects

About a year after the project described in the first fold formally ended, a conversation was conducted with the three researchers as participants. The conversation was inspired by a method sketched by Johansson (2015), namely confabulative conversations. The aim of the confabulative conversation is to create a methodologically smooth space that blurs distinctions between the real and possible, acknowledging the virtual as a producer of data (Johansson, 2015). The conversation in this project centred on the research conducted at the ECEC centres. Thus, the conversation that occurred between the three researchers was not a mere reflection of the earlier project or the notes from the centres. Instead, it produced methodological spaces of in-between, both with regard to place (here-there) and time (past-present). The conversation entailed revisiting the memories and affections from the research project, and it created re-organisations of thoughts as these were dwelt upon as being plugged-in to the other research participants' memories of the actual and virtual. The voices in the conversations explored the research project, creating new folds of time and space by blurring the distinctions between temporalities and places. This made the researchers revisit a time that had passed, but through the folds, had changed. The aim with this conversation was not to explore what had happened during the research, but to map the research affects that the project had produced and had continued to produce even after the project formally ended. In this context, confabulative conversations are about mapping research affects and creating new affects. Hence, this opens up the possibility for another understanding of what the data are and how the data are produced. Additionally, this created possibilities to continue the conversations about situations in the

research project; while this was ethically demanding at the time, in hindsight, perhaps it was even more challenging as the research affects continued to flow. The following section presents three examples illustrating some of the ethical challenges that were actualised with regard to the researcher position. These were ethically challenging during the specific situations and in their aftermath, as well as when determining how they should be dealt with in the analysis and in the final report.

### Three examples

The following section describes three examples from the research project conducted at ECEC centres that the researchers, in different ways, found especially challenging. The examples are sometimes slightly rephrased to ensure the anonymity of the informants.

#### *The closed door and affects of exclusion*

In this example, one researcher describes how the ambition to follow the work of the leader was suddenly put on hold when the leader closed the door to the office to conduct a meeting. The researcher was waiting outside the office, which is described as ‘the heart of the kindergarten’, in the centre of the building and close to the kitchen. According to the researcher, this is where things happen. The researcher reads aloud what she has written in her field notes:

A: [. . .] I look at the research questions again, to repeat for myself ‘what are we actually doing?’ in order not to get carried away, but to be able to keep a kind of research focus in the present situation. The meeting has now been going on for almost an hour. That’s quite a long meeting, I conclude, and maybe I would have wanted to be a shadow in there? And really, what is happening in there? Of course, I wonder about the scope of the meeting. Also, it would have been exciting to talk with the employees about what they think about the presence of the researcher, how they experience it? So, those are my thoughts, I get curious about this presence, not only the state of the leader, but also how the employees understand this? And there’s the hustle and bustle and the employees are walking by [. . .] When you sit by the office, you get a feeling of what is going on. I watch some children moving outside the window, it’s snowing today, and. . . my thoughts are spreading, children outside and snow and a snowman. . .

[. . .]

A: And eventually, I feel that I might be a little irritated, because I have written [in the field notes] that it’s first 11.15, and then it’s 11.40, right, and the conversation is still going on. Is that so smart? So much time?

The aim of the project was for the researcher to participate in the ordinary everyday events in the ECEC centres. However, there will always be occasions where a researcher cannot participate for several logical reasons. The situation described above is an example of one such occasion, where the leader is conducting a meeting with an employee behind closed doors. Until that point, the researcher had been taking part in most of the activities in which the leader was involved, group meetings and rounds through the ECEC centre, but also other meetings with specific employees. In general, the events that



arose whilst following the leader had a rather obvious structure, producing an inclusiveness and a rather unproblematic way to become a researcher by creating an opening for the researcher to ask questions, interact in conversations and write field notes based on observations. However, the closed door is a physical barrier and a materiality that changes the scene; it produces affects of exclusion. According to Deleuze and Guattari (2012), these affects can be seen as producing other kinds of becomings, but also, one might argue, un-comings. The affect of exclusion creates movements in which forces of the un-coming-researcher and the flows of the becoming-leader are at work, simultaneously, and without necessarily excluding each other. Thus, at first, the researcher uses the undefined moment to remind herself of the research topic, writing some notes, perhaps even contemplating, definitely accepting the closed door. However, as time goes by, the so-called affect of exclusion is putting the becoming-researcher in movement. The researcher, who had not received any information from the leader, neither about the length of the meeting nor its content, eventually started to question its form – not necessarily from a researcher’s perspective, but from the perspective of a former leader. In that sense, the researcher was becoming-leader, using the knowledge and experience from the past to understand and manage the situation. This movement of becoming-leader might have been supported by other employees’ ways of acting in relation to the closed door, as they also appeared to show affects of exclusion, where they were also apparently wondering about what was taking place within those walls. Regardless of the researcher’s former experiences, the closed door produces a position of momentary exclusion. However, as this case shows, the momentary loss of access might create another form of access, namely one actualised when the becoming-researcher is intertwined with becoming-leader. The movements between becoming-researcher and becoming-leader are produced by the affects of exclusion and by gaining and losing access, which actualise questions regarding the nature of the event and the decision made by the leader in that specific situation

This example illustrates what might be produced when the role of the researcher is in movement through affects created in-between inclusion and exclusion. Here, the movements between becoming-researcher and becoming-leader could be regarded as gaining and losing access to the field; thus, it is a productive movement since it produces questions as well as data. In research projects that focus on observations and conversations, this example would probably have garnered less interest; it might even have been put aside, dismissed as unproductive or ‘messy’. However, whilst focusing on mapping the research affects, this event is perceived as being productive because it raises important questions regarding the researcher’s shifting positions. In this sense, it is not solely a discussion about the position of the researcher, which might be dwelled upon in a study’s limited ethical section, it is also regarded as a productive force of the research affects and, thus, the data.

### *The confidential statement and becoming-supportive*

In this section, the researchers are discussing the challenges they confronted while conducting the study. This excerpt is divided into two parts.

B: 'I just have to get it out', one of the leaders says: 'I don't have an easy job', and then you get involved. . . and the confidence and to put words to it, it is relieving for me to be able to put words to it, regardless if I don't know what to do with it.

(comments from the others)

R: And what did you do then? Which position did you take?

B: I just say, that I take it with me, but at the moment, I don't know how to use it [the confidential statement]. You have to make some ethical trade-offs as a researcher. We have had some problems with that statement, what to do with it. [. . .] (continues)

In this excerpt, one of the researchers is describing a situation in which one of the leaders utters what could be considered a confidential statement that obviously challenged the position of the researcher. The first reaction of the researcher was a response of a becoming-researcher, a position in accordance with a rather established understanding of how to be a researcher, namely, to receive the utterance as it was said, without taking part in it, without adding intrigue. In this example, the researcher was aware of the specific situation the statement was based on, and the shared biography made it ethically challenging, as the following excerpt highlights:

B: I perceived this as a challenging ethical dilemma because I really understood what she was saying. I felt that I understood her dilemma. [. . .] When you participate as we did, when you encroach on a landscape where you can identify that there are challenges when it comes to cooperation and ways of being in the world, that might feel uncomfortable. So yes, it does something to you, both as a human being and as a researcher, to stand in this dilemma, first having this conversation and then taking part in the ordinary activities (slightly rephrased in order to protect the leader from being identified).

As argued, this is an ethically challenging situation due to the partly shared biographies and because, through her doubts, the researcher was a becoming-leader as she understood the problem that the leader faced. The ethical challenge is produced by the recognition of the problem, but also in the belief that she actually might have something to contribute to the situation – as a becoming-leader rather than as a becoming-researcher. What is important here is not what the researcher is, but the researcher's ability to affect and to be affected (Deleuze, 1988). This researcher's ability to affect, namely, to somehow influence the situation and to be affected, feeling the urge to contribute, is moving her in a direction towards being a becoming-leader. These abilities for affection are actualised due to, as argued, the partly shared biographies, because she has experience as a leader. The affects are moving the researcher in different directions simultaneously, all guided by the feeling of not being able to contribute when being a becoming-researcher is not perceived to be *enough*, either to help practically as a becoming-leader or as a friend as a becoming-supporter.

The statement in the excerpt could be ethically challenging regardless of which biographies the researcher inherits. However, if the researcher perceives a lack of knowledge and experience in how to possibly deal with the problem, or, differently put, lacks the ability to be affected and to affect, the range of the ethical dilemma is limited, and it

might be restricted solely to the wish to contribute without having knowledge about how to do so. Additionally, it is also regarded as ethically challenging since the possibility to contribute to solving the problem is perceived as an uncoming-researcher, thus abandoning the position of the researcher. It is this movement, the becoming-leader, which according to the researcher is experienced as taking place at the expense of the becoming-researcher, that makes it ethically demanding. It is ethically demanding during the actual event, but perhaps foremost in the aftermath of it, and in the feeling of not being *enough* in the entanglements with the leader. Even if the research project has formally ended, the affects of research continue to fold, unfold and re-fold, and they continue to produce questions, re-orient thoughts and create affections of unease.

### *The reflective email and the affects of trust*

As seen in the following excerpt, the researchers were invited to share their memories from the research project and especially the data collection.

D: The first thing that pops up in my mind is the trust they show me and what I am getting into, the dilemmas they [the leaders in the ECEC centres] have to deal with, in the processes [. . .]. This [the research project] made the director reflect, and she invited me to take part in her personal reflections on herself as a leader. She sent me long emails with descriptions and reflections. . . (some comments). I found that very moving. Also, that the head of the department did the same, eventually. The trust had somehow to be established. She was very brave in sharing her challenges.

R: Which expectations did you feel (some comments and questions) as a researcher when you received these emails with reflections? What did that make you think?

D: The message I got from the director was that ‘I hope this can contribute something to your research’. So. . . I thought this was interesting to explore further, to use it as a part of the research. She did not only show me trust personally, but also as researcher.

Here, entanglements between the researcher and her biography, the director, the research project and the means of digital communication all produce data. It appears that trust is the catalyst that makes the entanglements possible, but also productive. Trust is usually the result of productive relations, of respect and, sometimes, although not exclusively, the experience of shared biography. In that sense, trust is often, but again not exclusively, associated with insiderness. In relation to the ideal in some disciplines to go ‘native’, Blake (2007: 415) writes that ‘. . . trust arises from within relationships at a personal level. . .’, and that this ideal might be ‘. . . a better way to create an honest, trustworthy and “safe” research environment’. However, in this excerpt, the researcher describes that the trust in this situation goes beyond the personal. Instead, trust could be regarded as a collective flow that appears within the specific event. Thus, trust does not arise from one of the participating persons; rather, it is actualised within the intra-actions in the event as well as in the thresholds between the different research positions. These thresholds are methodologically productive because it is in there, in the middle, where becomings can take place (Deleuze and Guattari, 2012).

However, as this researcher described in connection with this event, ‘the challenging aspect in this was how we could use the information which in some sense was to be regarded as sensitive, in the further research’. When data are produced by the affects of trust, ethical questions must be asked in relation to the research; however, the kinds of questions to ask might differ depending on the understanding of what trust might be. In this case, and probably influenced by the conventional division between the positions of insider and outsider, the researcher perceives trust as something developing from the shared biography, from sharing a part of their past experience. Without doubt, that understanding might produce ethical dilemmas on how to handle the data. However, the main problem might be that data produced by this understanding of personal trust could be dismissed as being ‘subjective’ or ‘messy’, and not in accordance with the almost constantly insidious ideals of objectiveness. Instead, if trust is regarded not as something taking departure in neither the researcher nor the leader, but if it is understood as flows of affects produced within the event, the contours of the ethical dilemmas must be re-drawn. As affective flow, trust cannot be controlled or steered by an intention from, for example, the researcher. Instead, affects of trust can be understood as something that is actualised from the complex interplay, or plugging-ins, between the different components in the event – not exclusively the shared biographies. The affects of trust are impersonal; therefore, their productions of data cannot be easily dismissed as being ‘subjective’. These affects are not to be regarded as preconditions for research; rather, they are the possible result of the plugging-ins in a research event. With this understanding, the risk that important data would be omitted because of the (perhaps incorrect) perceptions of being an insider is restricted and even avoided. Instead, with regard to clarity within a research process, what becomes important is the aim to map these affects of trust.

### **The folding continues. . .**

Certainly, there are research projects that end, that stop with their final report or when the findings are accepted for publication as a paper in a journal. However, some projects seem to continue long after deadlines have passed or articles have been published. They leave researchers not just with their results or findings, but also with new questions, wonderings and perhaps even doubts. This article has explored the so-called research affects through conversations with researchers that participated in a completed research project. What these three researchers have in common is that they have inhabited the spaces in-between different research positions, with biographies both similar and different from the leaders they were studying. In this context, affects could be regarded as un-actualised feelings, leaving traces in the researcher-body and the project, making it difficult to place the producer of the affects, namely the research, solely in the past. The project continues to live through these affects. According to Deleuze (1988), a body can only be defined by its ability to affect, and to be affected. In the study presented in this paper, the research-bodies have certain abilities to be affected, but also to affect, exactly because they inhabit these spaces in-between, spaces to which they either gain or lose access. Other studies (e.g. Adler and Adler, 1987; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Griffith, 1998) have pointed out that the dichotomy between insider and outsider is rather redundant, and this article has shown that movements taking place *in-between*, back and forth,

could be regarded as productive and creative. The movements produce data, but also, as described, research affects, for example, the affects of exclusion when a usually open office door is closed, creating spaces of becoming-leader. This creates the opportunity, for a moment, to leave the position of the researcher and become a leader, for example, by questioning the frames of a meeting. In other words, the affects produce becomings, changes and challenges to the present state in the research event, forcing the researcher to think/act differently. Thus, the movements and the affects are important for the data that are produced and for what is written down in the researchers' notebooks. Since the affects have importance for which data are produced, they also contain ethical dimensions. Consequently, the ethical dimension does not depend on whether the researcher is an outsider or insider, but on which affects are created and what kind of becoming they entail. As the examples show, the ethical dilemmas are actualised when the researchers are in movement, when they can no longer follow predefined descriptions on how to act according to a specific methodology.

The point of departure seen in the excerpts included in this article exemplify specific situations from the everyday work of leaders when research affects are produced that challenge the positions of the researchers. These research affects simultaneously actualise other important questions related to how to use and present the data. Beyond doubt, data can be obtained through defined and stable research positions. However, as argued in this article, the unstable roles and the movements between positions are to be understood as being inherently creative and productive. Data produced in the thresholds and becomings have the ability to go beyond representations and established knowledge, making room for the complex and messy. Such data have the ability to question the given and established. In line with the reasoning proposed by Johansson and Hall (2019) and Davies (2014), the examples in this article highlight the fact that ethically demanding situations are created in these complex, messy and uncontrolled movements in which predefined ethical guidelines provide little help. Thus, ethics is not given; rather, it is actualised in the relations between the components in the situation, in the becomings. As the examples show, these kinds of ethically demanding situations continue to produce affects, questions and doubts, even after the fieldwork and research project have come to an end.

This article has been a folding, unfolding and refolding of data from a project that has formally ended. The project obviously continued to produce research affects that enabled it to live on and produce. Time, space, field notes, relations and so on have produced folds that changed the light of the research events. As argued, this is not unique for this project; the idea of creating spaces for continuing the folds might be relevant for all research projects in which the research positions, in any sense, have been in movement. This article problematises the image of the stable research position with the ambition to illuminate the movements that occur beyond the dichotomies between insider and outsider. As the results of different kinds of affects and becomings, these movements can be understood as prerequisites for the production of data with the ability to question the given. This study contributes to the field in that it illustrates how methodological spaces and folds can be created that help map the research affects at play and produce possibilities for additional research affects to flow. Arguably, this is especially important with regard to ethically demanding situations, which might continue to be productive even

though the research project might have formally ended. Importantly, these situations should not be dismissed or forgotten; they should be addressed and kept alive. As research data are allowed to continue to fold, unfold and refold, whilst letting ‘. . . it go through the ceiling’ (Deleuze, 1993: 39), new questions can be asked, thoughts can be re-oriented and established findings and knowledge can be challenged.

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