

# Belonging and non-belonging in forced migration settings: Insights from collaborative photography and documentary theatre

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Photo: Tuomo Manninen

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## Creative practice & forced migration

### Key questions

- How can creative and participatory practice facilitate collaboration in order to go *beyond (linear) language* (translanguaging, Baynham & Lee, 2019)?
- Can creative practice truly enhance understanding of forced migration and belonging?

### Two examples

- Collaborative photography with unaccompanied minors
- Documentary theatre with refugee artists and actors

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## Arts-based research/ creative inquiry in applied linguistics

- research *with* the arts (i.e., what can working with the arts tell us about applied linguistics?);
- research *into* the arts (i.e., what can working with applied linguistics tell us about the arts?);
- research *through* the arts (i.e., using arts-based and arts-informed methods as theory and methodology)
  - (Bradley & Harvey 2019)

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## Belonging (& non-belonging)

- dynamic process rather than a reified fixity (Yuval-Davis 2006; Anthias 2012); place, people, planet...
- simultaneous belonging & displacement – here and there (Butler & Spivak 2007)
- voluntary & forced, constantly negotiated
- structural and political (Crenshaw 1991)
- affective experience; 'impulse for some sort of attachment' (Probyn 1996)
- community shaped by differences (Morley 2000), conviviality (Rymes 2014), commonplace diversity (Wessendorf 2014)

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Vöyri – Vörå  
 Bilingual rural town  
 ca 7.700 permanent residents

Swedish 82.5%, Finnish 12.9%  
 Other languages 4.6%

Oravais Reception centre (1991)  
 Group home for unaccompanied minors (2007)

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## Jag bor i Oravais

- Multi-sited linguistic team ethnography in Swedish Ostrobothnia, Finland (2015-2018, ongoing)
- Explores people the ways in which individuals seeking asylum talk about their **everyday life** at a reception centre and other local venues.
- Analyses the **significance of Swedish and Finnish** in research participants' lives and discusses lived experiences in wider political contexts and social structures.

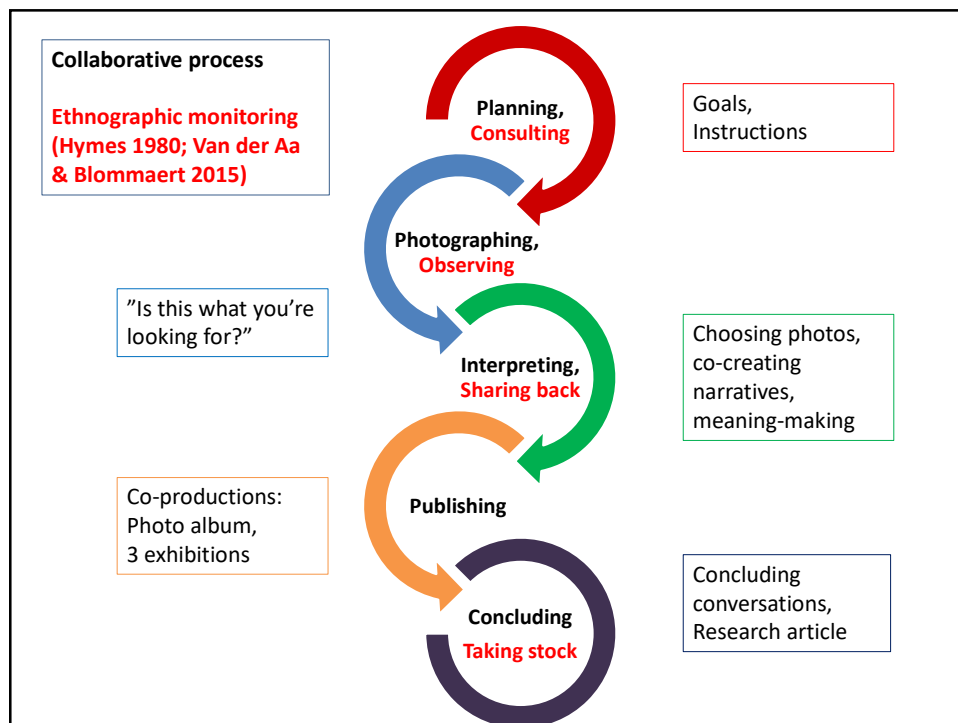
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## Guiding questions

- How to make sense of **life trajectories and everyday experiences** of unaccompanied minors in their new circumstances?
- How to build **a relationship of mutual understanding** with both these young people and their counsellors?
- How can artistic and participatory practice (photography) facilitate **creating and understanding belonging** and **cross** semiotic borders?
- -> **collaborative & co-produced arts-based research**

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## How to start?

- "well, actually he (one of the boys) was home alone, and I did not know how to start taking photographs with him so we went to clean the sauna."
  - Gustaf, counsellor & professional photographer
  - Gaining trust through everyday action

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## Lessons learned

- Building trust and relationships between researchers, young asylum seekers and people working with them is a complex process, which requires long-term commitment.
  - Not self-evident but needs to be frequently negotiated
- Photography project: a space to tell a story in own time and in own way.
  - Researchers' task: creating the space through epistemic solidarity (Van der Aa, 2017; Pöyhönen et al. 2020)

Read more: Pöyhönen, S., L. Kokkonen, M. Tarnanen & M. Lappalainen (2020). Belonging, trust and relationships: Collaborative photography with unaccompanied minors. In E. Moore, J. Bradley & J. Simpson (eds.) *Translanguaging as transformation: The collaborative construction of new linguistic realities*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 58–75.

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## Toinen koti – Other Home Documentary theatre (2016-2018)

- Other Home illuminated
  - various struggles in the process of integration and settlement in Finland
  - Individual pathways and stories
- Other Home also described
  - how refugee artists were navigating the labyrinth of the Finnish asylum system,
  - how asylum authorities questioned their artistic experience and careers
- Short film: Youtube, Toinen koti ArtsEqual (subtitled in English, Arabic, Finnish)
- Performance: <https://kansallisteatteri.fi/esitys/toinen-koti/>

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## Story-telling and story-listening

- Community shaped by differences (Morley 2000), conviviality (Rymes 2014), commonplace diversity (Wessendorf 2014)
- Creating spaces for stories that participants want to tell (Van der Aa, 2017)
- Documentary theatre as a platform for story-telling and story-listening

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## Conclusions

- Forced migration: balancing acts and ethical issues
  - Arts-based collaborative/participatory methods are useful for creating translanguaging spaces (Simpson et al. 2018) and for sharing and understanding
  - Possibility to create new stories, giving hope
  - Art institutions open to refugee narratives (Lehtonen & Pöyhönen 2019; McKay & Bradley 2016)
  - Stories as lived traumatic experiences vs. stories as material for arts and research
    - Sharing the stories within the group
    - Sharing the stories with an audience
    - Sharing the stories in research
  - Fixed positions: Why do refugees tell only refugees' stories?

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Photo: Kati Kaartinen

Read more about the Toinen koti documentary theatre performance (in English, Arabic, Finnish):

<http://www.kiertuenayttamo.fi/esitykset/toinen-koti/>

Blogposts in English by James Simpson

<https://tlangblog.wordpress.com/2016/11/08/arts-based-research-research-based-arts/>

<https://tlangblog.wordpress.com/2018/02/04/toinen-koti-other-home/>

Documentary films (subtitled versions in Finnish, Arabic, English)

Youtube: Toinen koti ArtsEqual

Research article: Lehtonen, J. & Pöyhönen, S. (2019). Documentary theatre as a platform for hope and social justice. In E. Anttila & A. Suominen (eds.) *Critical Articulations of Hope from the Margins of Arts Education. International Perspectives and Practices*. London: Routledge, 31-44.