Collaborating in the choreographic process:
A choreographer's approach to a dancer's creativity

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During my Master in Choreography study (Fontys School of Arts 2011-2013) I researched and analysed the choreographer's perspective on the choreographic process, which started from my personal interest and perspective as a choreographer. I asked myself questions about the awareness of the choices we make and how we (differently) collaborate while being in a creative process. I wanted to gain insight in the relationship between the choreographer and the dancer(s) in collaboration and the choreographic process itself.
At the final research stage of the program, while writing my thesis, I narrowed this topic down within the field of contemporary dance and choreography, having one main research question:

How can a choreographer engage most effectively with dancers and their creativity in a collaborative choreographic process?

I identified my Master research into three sub-considerations:

1. *How to approach a dancer or group of dancers, working in collaboration? For example; with what tasks, guidance and response methods? This includes questioning and knowing what kind of dancer(s) one is working with and what the range of the choreographer's working method(s) is.*
2. *Is the outcome of a task and the response of a dancer what the choreographer needs and/or asks for?*
   This includes an expectation on the outcome, with regards to the overall vision of the creation, in specific parts and as a whole.
3. *Can one work with the same ongoing approach when collaborating, or do different stages of the choreographic process have different influences and needs that affect the way of working?*

To underpin this research I applied existing theories in combination with a case study on the choreographic process '*Twofold*' by Lieneke Mous (a Dutch choreographer and dance educator, 1984) and dancers from *New Dance Company* (2013). Adding the case study to this research is helpful, as it gains concrete examples to theories and findings and current existing literature on collaborative choreographic processes seen and written from an external, observing point of view is lacking.
     To be able to analyse the *Twofold* process I observed and filmed all the attended rehearsals, used observational writing during the rehearsals to log what was happening in the moment (including my own thoughts coming in) and held individual interviews with the choreographer and dancers.

I divided the research framework into four sections: the choreographer-dancer(s) collaborative relationship and working method (A), the dancer's creativity (B), the general stages of a choreographic process (C) and an analysis of the case study (D). In this article I explain my research methods and findings on the choreographer-dancer(s) role and relationship and how to approach the dancer(s) and their creativity.

The choreographer-dancer(s) collaborative role and relationship
How a choreographer chooses to approach a dancer or group of dancers can be related to the type of collaboration they are working in. According to Jo Butterworth there are five types of choreographic processes. Butterworth created the Didactic-Democratic spectrum model that distinguishes these. In my research I focused on three out of the five processes, as Butterworth puts these forward as 'distinct dance-devising processes' and therefore collaborative. She links these process-types to relationship-types between choreographer and dancer:

In process 3, where dancers are contributing to the concept of a choreographer, the choreographer is named *pilot* and each dancer is a *contributor*. Here the dancer brings in ideas and responds to tasks framed by the choreographer's concept or theme.

In process 4 dancers are collaborating with a choreographer, which creates the relationship *facilitator-creator(s)*. This means the dancer can negotiate in concept and creation, which involves (partly) shared decision-making.

In process 5 there is a *collaborator-co-owner(s)* relationship, where both dancer and choreographer have 'ownership' of the work and decide on the content and intention together (Butterworth, 2009).

It is possible that a choreographic process experiences shifts in process-types or combines several. For example choreographers Rosemary Butcher (1947, UK) and Lieneke Mous both see themselves as collaborators, but at the same time they are the final decision-makers of their work; Butcher mentions she enjoys the responsibility and Mous describes it as '*having her name under it*' (Mous in interview, 04-03-2013). From this perspective both would match process 3 (*pilot-contributor)*, but in their work method they extend their approach and include process 4 (*facilitator-creator)*: Butcher lets herself be affected by the uniqueness of the dancers, recognising how dancers can manifest something you can't get to in any other way (2005). Mous sees dancers as contributors as well. She wants to let the dancers experience being artists who create, while Mous respects and guides them.

Approaching the dancer(s)
With each process-type and -role, Butterworth relates specific teaching methods and learning approaches. This means that choreographers like Butcher and Mous use the teaching methods *leading* and *guiding* (process 3) and *nurturing* and *mentoring* (process 4). In both process-types the dancers respond to tasks and contribute to guided discovery. The differences in their learning approaches are that in process 3 dancers replicate material from others and in process 4 they are actively participating and work with a problem-solving perspective.
In a *collaborator-co-owner* role (process 5) the teaching method is called *shared authorship* and its learning approach is *experiential*.

Butterworth shows the overlap and diversity among the different processes and her model is applicable and related to actual choreographic processes. However, it does not show how these teaching methods and learning approaches are carried out. Therefore I linked Butterworth's model to Howard Gardner's multiple

intelligences theory (among others), which I applied to examples seen in the case study *Twofold*, by Mous and dancers.

Gardner (1943) initially formulated seven intelligences based on the human cognition and Mous and the dancers addressed to all: the *Bodily-kinaesthetic-* (physical), *Linguistic-* (spoken and written word), *Spatial-* (space & patterns), *Musical-* (musicality), *Interpersonal-* (understanding intentions & motivations of others), *Logical-mathematical-* (logic & analysis) and *Intrapersonal* (understanding oneself) *intelligences* (Gardner 1999/2002). Knowing which intelligences choreographers and dancers work with and when or how they are utilised within the process gives more awareness of the choreographic process-type and underpins Butterworth's model on the choreographer and dancers' skills.

The *Twofold* process showed diversity in the use of these intelligences when shifting in process-types and –roles. An example from the case study:

Mous combined the Bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence, Linguistic intelligence and Interpersonal intelligence approximately equal in her approach. The other intelligences are shown more in one or the other role: When Mous is in her role as facilitator and mentoring/nurturing the dancers, she relates mostly to the Intrapersonal intelligence. When being in the pilot role, she approaches the dancers on the Spatial-, Musical and Logical-mathematical intelligences, leading/guiding them.

As each dancer is unique and differs from another, a type of approach and/or specific intelligences can address more or less to an individual. Therefore keeping awareness and variety among these is an important factor in a choreographer's approach during the collaborative choreographic process.

Approaching a dancer's creativity
A choreographer who is collaborating in Butterworth's process-types 3, 4 or 5 invites the dancer(s) to actively participate and be creatively involved. According to US choreographer Hope Mohr it is part of the choreographer's job to see and decide what each dancer needs in order to be most creative (Mohr, 2012). When a dancer receives a task from the choreographer and needs to deliver a creative response, the dancer mostly needs 'enough time and space to work independently', before the created part will be evaluated by the choreographer. Mohr also acknowledges that dancers differ. For example one might need more privacy to be able to create than others.

Approaching creativity can vary by group or individual tasks or guidance (Thórhallsdóttir, 2008). In the *Twofold process*, Mous and the dancers worked with both group and individual situations, although group creativity was mainly used in the early stages of the process, for example by doing improvisations. When the movement material was required to be more specific, the dancers received often the same task, but were individually creatively dealing with it. They were all in the same studio while creating.

According to Larry Lavender, a choreographer needs specific tools to address every aspect of dance making; the actions in the process of dance making, the creation intentions and mentoring and critiquing the creative process and the work (2009). When having the awareness and capability to address to these

aspects, one can communicate effectively on the progress of the process and the choreography itself. An example of Lavender's given tools is the ' the art of prompting', which contains prompts that are usable as speech acts and give guidance. His prompts are not only supposed to give the choreographer tools to approach the dancers and their creativity, but it also gives the dancers variety and clarity in order to be creative.

Conclusion
To engage with a dancer's creativity, choreographers can use Butterworth's Didactic-Democratic spectrum model to increase awareness of their own choreographic process, which gains an insight in: the collaboration-type, the relationship with the dancer(s) and which related methods and approaches one can use, as seen by examples of the *Twofold* process. One can question which types of intelligences he wants to address to; which skills are needed in the creation, and at what stage of the process? Hereby the creation-tasks towards the dancer(s) gain clarity in content and communication, which means the choreographer is asking or prompting what he is aiming for, keeping in mind that a dancer needs time and guidance to sort out a task.

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