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ENGLISH SUMMARY

This doctoral research explores the complex and challenging processes of becoming in middle management positions within public educational organizations in Denmark. The research elucidates how selected teachers, affected by recent policy reforms, come to perform an informal middle management position by working closely with school management in developing and facilitating certain organizational agendas, such as strengthening the professional development of fellow teachers and ultimately student outcome. This includes honing overall school teaching practices and stimulating general pedagogical reflection.

In the literature on middle management, the complexity of this position is often discussed in terms of its middle-level location within a hierarchical form of organizing, thus highlighting issues relating to being stuck or sandwiched in-between different organizational levels. These include the struggles involved in navigating the contrasting logics of the strategic apex and the operating floor, or the simultaneous expectations of a superior and a subordinate. However, less research has explored middle management as a practice that permeates hierarchies and other formal structures. This means that the more subtle, informal and blurred constructions of middle management, and related effects when becoming in middle management positions, have been mostly left unattended.

This research develops a constitutive approach inspired by organizational discourse and new materialist theorizing that allows for a rethinking of notions of hierarchy and formality by theorizing how relations of multiple discursive and material elements take part in constituting middle management. By implication, this approach enables a view of middle management as an ongoing becoming that unfolds via the precarious practices of everyday work – in and through a mesh of policy reforms, expectations, teacher tasks, colleagues, school management, relationships, students and more. Hence, the research contributes with a reconceptualization of middle management that challenges the presumed hierarchical organizing and formal position of a middle manager in the extant literature.

The dissertation empirically explores the becoming of middle management positions through a multi-sited and ethnographic inspired case study of two primary and lower secondary schools' efforts to improve school practices by enhancing the functions of middle managers. Manifested through three article contributions, the research specifically examines, in the first article, the potential of developing methods that are sensitive to the discursive and material relations constituting middle management positions. In doing so, the article utilizes the concept of multimodality as a way to empirically approach the constituting dynamics of discourse-materiality relations. It does so by arguing that we sensitize, and thereby retool, our methods towards multimodalities, such as language, images, feelings, bodies, spaces etc., when generating data.

The second article analytically unpacks the identity construction processes and inherent challenges relating to simultaneously enacting a position as a teacher and a middle manager. The article's findings show how identi*ties* are performed in and through the everyday practices of middle management work and teaching work. Thus, highlighting the identity construction process as a form of identity entanglement.

Finally, the third article explores the complex and muddled work practices of middle managers and their effects. The findings show that middle management work becomes in blurred and moving ways across multiple discursive-material elements, such as structures and formal job descriptions, but also collegial relationships, feelings, tasks, technologies, spaces and times etc. This produces an entanglement of clear/unclear distinctions that configures their work as liminal – an ongoing social limbo – contributing with both complexity-maximizing and complexity-reducing aspects in everyday work.

In closing, this dissertation discusses the effects of becoming in middle management positions in a Danish educational context. It highlights that, although the complexity of this position has been addressed at the level of local government as well as nationally, with the intention of improving the legitimacy of the teacher as a middle manager within their local schools, these 'formalizing' initiatives seem to only address a small part of the complexity. What they do not address are the more 'fluid' effects that appear in the cracks of everyday work and relate, for example, to compensating strategies to get things done or being available to help colleagues at all times. Hence, this research hopes to create awareness around the legitimacy of the more fluid effects – beyond notions of middle management work as a formal position within the school hierarchy.

DANSK RESUME

Denne afhandling udforsker nye mellemlederpositioner i offentlige uddannelsesorganisationer i Danmark, og specifikt de komplekse og til tider udfordrende tilblivelsesprocesser som mellemleder. I lyset af det seneste årtis uddannelsesreformer, viser afhandlingen hvordan udvalgte lærere i grundskolen i særlige vejlederpositioner indgår som en form for uformelle mellemledere. Det gør de i den forstand, at de samarbejder tæt med skoleledelsen i udviklingen af skolen som organisation, der i sidste ende har til hensigt at styrke elevernes læring og trivsel. Dette indebærer blandt andet, at de pågældende lærere får ansvaret for at videreudvikle og skærpe kollegers undervisning ved fx, via observation, at facilitere en dialog om og en didaktisk refleksion over den givne undervisningspraksis i et fremadrettet perspektiv.

I mellemlederlitteraturen diskuteres kompleksiteten ved denne position ofte i relation til mellemlederens placering i midten af et organisatorisk hierarki. Det vil sige, at litteraturen i høj grad tager udgangspunkt i en forståelse af mellemledelse som en formel hierarkisk og veldefineret position og heraf fremhæver problematikker, der relaterer sig til den tvetydighed og de spændinger, der kan være forbundet med et arbejde i en organisatorisk midte - mellem to andre organisatoriske lag: det strategiske ledelseslag og det operative lag "på gulvet". Det har ført til indsigter, der vedrører mellemlederes oplevelser af at være 'fanget' i en hierarkisk midte med krydspres af forventninger, potentielle loyalitetskonflikter, divergerende logikker etc. Dog er undersøgelser af mellemledelse, der udforsker de mere subtile, uformelle og uklare konstruktioner af dette arbejde, og som herved "bryder" med denne hierarkiske forståelse af mellemlederen *i* en midte, underudviklet.

Dette studie udvikler et konstituerende perspektiv på mellemledelse inspireret af et organisationsteoretisk diskursperspektiv og nymaterialistisk teori. Dette muliggør en ny forståelse af mellemledelse som en arbejdspraksis og -tilblivelse, der skabes i relationerne mellem diverse diskursive og materielle elementer - som del af en hverdagspraksis. Disse diskursive og materielle elementer, som tager del i mellemleder-tilblivelsen, er fx uddannelsesreformer, almindelige læreropgaver, kollegaer, skoleledelser, kollegarelationer, elever, følelser, teknologier mm. Hermed bidrager afhandlingen med en rekonceptualisering af mellemledelse, der udfordrer forståelser af mellemledelse som en prædefineret entitet og hierarkisk form for organisering.

Studiets problemstilling udforskes empirisk gennem et multi-site etnografisk inspireret casestudie af to skolers brug af mellemledere i styrkelsen af skolernes samlede faglige niveau. Igennem tre artikler undersøger studiet dels, i artikel et, udviklingen af metoder, der inkluderer diskursive og materielle elementer. I artiklen inddrages begrebet multimodalitet med henblik på empirisk at kunne tilgå de diskursive og materielle relationer, der er medskabere af mellemledelses-tilblivelsen.

I artiklen argumenteres der for, at vi som forskere bør udvikler metoder, der er sensitive overfor multimodalitet og herved de konstitutive dynamikker – også når vi genererer data. Dette betyder, at vi bør anerkende og inkludere multimodaliteter, så som, følelser, kroppe rum, tider, sprog, strukturer, dokumenter, det sagte, såvel som det usagte mm.

I artikel to udfoldes mellemledernes identitetskonstruktionsproces analytisk, og de udfordringer, der relaterer sig til i et flydende nu at skulle agere lærer og mellemleder, ofte på en og samme tid. Analysen viser, hvordan diverse identiteter performes kontinuerligt igennem lærer-hverdagspraksisser og mellemleder-hverdagspraksisser. Dermed fremhæver analysen, at mellemledernes identitetskonstruktionsproces er en form for identitets-forvikling.

Tredje artikel udforsker mellemledernes komplekse og mudrede arbejdspraksisser og deres effekter. Analysen viser, at deres arbejde bliver til på uklare og bevægelige måder igennem forskellige diskursive og materielle elementer, så som strukturer og formelle funktionsbeskrivelse, men også igennem skiftende kollegiale relationer, nye opgaver, tider og steder. Denne tilblivelse producerer forviklinger af klare og uklare distinktioner, der konfigurerer deres arbejde som en form for liminalt arbejde. Det vil sige, et kontinuerlig socialt limbo. Dette medfører både kompleksitetsmaksimerende og kompleksitetsreducerende aspekter til deres arbejde.

Afsluttende diskuterer afhandlingen effekter af mellemledernes arbejdstilblivelse i en dansk uddannelseskontekst. I diskussionen fremhæves det, at selvom der nationalt såvel som lokalt i kommunerne er gjort forsøg med at reducere kompleksiteten for disse medarbejdere - ved, at skoleledelsen i højere grad legitimerer denne position tydeligere ind i organisationsstrukturen - så adresserer disse initiativer kun en del af kompleksiteten. Hvad der ikke er adresseret, er de mere flydende og subtile effekter, der løber i fx arbejdssprækkerne og identitetsforviklingerne relateret til denne position. Det omhandler fx kompenserende praksisser, som mellemlederne udvikler for at kunne stå bedst muligt til rådighed for kolleger og ledelse, for at få ting gjort eller for at kunne være en god kollega mm. Med denne afhandling håber jeg også at skabe opmærksomhed omkring vigtigheden i at legitimere – ikke bare den formelle position – men også de mere flydende og subtile effekter.

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Undertaking doctoral research and embarking on a three-year journey with the possibility of growing, going in-depth, meeting and working with inspiring and wise people – fellow researchers and field practitioners – is an immense privilege. There are many people to whom I would like to give thanks for helping to make this research a reality.

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Mie, I have learned that ambition and generosity go hand in hand in academia. Throughout this process, you have kept me on my toes, encouraging me to continuously refine, nuance and sharpen my claims and arguments – *it's almost there* is your mantra and I am grateful for that push and grateful that it is always accompanied by kindness. You are extremely generous in sharing your insights, your work and your network. It is a quality I will aspire towards.

Rasmus, you entered the game as my supervisor a little later, but you are no less appreciated. Thank you for engaging in this research project without hesitation and offering your sharp eye for coherence and questions of 'what's the pain?'

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. AN OPENING VIGNETTE

As a middle manager in a school, working with colleagues as they develop their teaching practices sometimes means that you come with an area of concern that is predefined by school management. However, it can happen that a change in focus may occur during this process if, for example, the particular teacher recognizes a different or more pressing priority. In such situations, the focus of the teacher may diverge from that of the school.

There is coffee on the table in the narrow meeting room. Lene, a middle manager, comes rushing through the door, apologizing for being a few minutes late. She was just finishing up her recess duty at the other end of the building. Her colleagues, the two teachers who are already here, awaiting their meeting to begin, have been here for five minutes. They don't seem to mind that Lene is a bit late. It's no problem, says one teacher. "Have a cup of coffee and take a breather before we start." Lene seems relieved by this. She takes off her coat and pours herself a cup of coffee. They start talking about a student they all seem to know. "Well," Lene says, all of a sudden. She pulls out her computer, some books and a few folders. Then she turns her computer around, so that her colleagues can see the screen. What is displayed is a form of agenda and process plan. She explains, while pointing at the screen, that the coming collaboration and intervention is a new initiative at the school. Her colleagues seem a bit puzzled by this very specific agenda. One of them starts talking about a worry she has concerning her class and their overall reading level. This conversation goes on for a while. Lene starts suggesting that they read particular books.

Later in the week, the same middle manager, Lene, describes the meeting this way: "I felt that my colleague, Trine, reacted a bit differently at our last meeting. I don't know if it was because what I came with was not what she expected. However, the meeting ended with an agreement to do more of what Trine wanted or needed. That means not following the formal (school) agenda and process plan. Whether school management is going to be happy with that decision, I don't know, but it's where the greatest need is and where I can make a difference."

In those situations where you experience that a colleague's need is not the same as those defined by the school, as a middle manager, you sometimes have to act on your own, and simply do what is needed and follow feelings of what makes sense.

I begin with this small tale – a vignette – because it gives insight into the everyday work of middle managers.[1] It illustrates the entanglement of conflicting expectations, recess duties, feelings, changing positions, relationships, organizational documents etc. that all take part in shaping the becoming of middle management. Thus, this introductory vignette gives a small glimpse into what is about to unfold – an exploration of how middle management finds itself becoming within a mesh of teacher colleagues, tasks, school management, expectations and more.

1.2. MIDDLE MANAGEMENT ON THE RISE

This dissertation explores middle management positions within public educational organizations in Denmark and how they have been affected by recent policy reforms (UVMa, 2013) and contoured by increased expectations of school improvement and effectiveness. As a mode of governance, the reforms are in line with an international trend and discourse within educational research that foregrounds school leadership as a game changer in terms of effectiveness and eventual student outcome (Robinson *et al.*, 2008; Robinson *et al.*, 2009; Robinson, 2011). This suggested relationship between leadership and learning results in the enhanced distribution of leadership responsibilities throughout schools, producing new management positions for selected teachers with the purpose of supporting this development (F.B. Andersen, 2016). Although the concept of having selected teachers carry out coordinating, supporting and advisory functions alongside their teaching responsibilities is not new (Bjerg, 2014; EVA, 2009, 2012;), conceptualizing teachers as a form of management resource with the organizational agenda of improving school efficiency is.

Accordingly, the selected teachers are expected to perform an informal middle management position, as they co-lead a certain organizational development; however, without any formal decision-making power. This produces muddled work processes and experiences of increased work complexity, in terms of, for example, conflicts of loyalty, struggles with sometimes speaking on behalf of or against school management, navigating contrasting agendas or problems with being recognized as a colleague, as well as new and enhanced expectations of (informal) influence and organizing (F.B. Andersen, 2014; Hansen *et al*., 2014).

In the literature on middle management, such complexity has been described as concerning, for example, their coordinating, mediating and cross-cutting communication and work practices (e.g., Ashforth *et al.*, 2000; Iedema *et al.*, 2004; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011) in-between the strategic apex and the operating core (Mintzberg, 1989). This complexity has also been attributed to the managing of

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[1] Vignettes are developed as a part of this doctoral research. They are written on the basis of generated data. I unfold on these developments in "Chapter 5: Methodology".

blurred relationships (Uyterhoeven, 1989) and being 'sandwiched' (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020) or caught in the crossfire of pressure (Sims, 2003). That is, having to navigate ambiguous expectations from above and below, continually alternating between contradictory positions, and as a consequence struggling with related matters of identity work (Harding *et al.*, 2014; Thomas & Linstead, 2002). Research presenting such messy aspects of middle management life, broadly speaking, reflects a tendency within the literature to challenge some of the earlier, more prescriptive and functionalistic, conceptualizations of middle management as a matter of identifying and performing best practice (e.g., Keys & Bell 1982).

A great deal of this contemporary literature is informed by critical, often discourse analytical approaches, which by implication view middle management as a social construction constituted in/through discourse (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Harding *et al.*, 2014; Thomas & Linstead, 2002; Watson, 2001). However, the majority of these studies still conceptualize middle management as a position that is 'locked' into a hierarchical middle (for exceptions see e.g., Ainsworth *et al.*, 2009): the manager is sandwiched (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020), integrated into organizational units (Rouleau & Balogun, 2007), constructed of hierarchies (Harding *et al.*, 2014) etc. This means, that the middle manager is still conceptualized, implicitly or explicitly, as a hierarchical form of organizing, a formal position within an organization – that is, an entity, in a particular location – above some and below others. Although these significant contributions elucidate various messy aspects concerning the complexity of middle management work, the problem that this dissertation addresses is not just that such conceptualizations privilege hierarchy and structure, but more that by doing so they reproduce somewhat realist assumptions about organizations as containers with prescribed hierarchical structures. This sets up a particular premise about how we are to study and understand middle management issues. Thus, while offering insights into mess, crossfire and sandwiching, extant studies also limit how we can approach and understand middle management as more than hierarchies and structures.

Without disagreeing that these studies puzzle with the complexity and mess, this dissertation will try to expand the premise through which we may understand the becoming of middle management in/through such mess. Thus, the study will explore middle management as more than a hierarchical form of organizing or a formal position. In doing so, I let go of the aforementioned hierarchical premise, which then allows me to view these complex processes of becoming as they unfold in a mesh of policy reforms, local school management, teacher colleagues, students, 'normal' teacher tasks, politics, expectations and more.

I will examine these issues by proposing a constitutive perspective (Grant *et al.*, 2004) inspired by new materialism (Barad, 2003), which entails a view of middle management as a constitutive process and an ongoing becoming. This takes account of discursive and material forces in the communication and interactions amongst human and non-human actors, including hierarchies and formal job descriptions, but

also discourses, formal and informal practices, relationships, politics, materialities, spaces, bodies etc. Thus, this dissertation strengthens an approach to the becoming of middle management as movement, entanglements, multiple agencies – a performative focus, which enables an exploration of how middle management materializes itself and the implications of such materialization – a form of dissolution, then, of fixed, or static conceptualizations. In this dissertation, these materializations concern the development of particular work practices, or forms of organizing[2] and the identity work that takes place when becoming in the middle. Clearly, in this context, 'in the middle', does not refer to a static space, but rather to an emerging and embodied 'reality' of middle management.

In this way, the study extends the critical branches of management and organization studies, in particular those concerned with discourse, materiality, process and relationality (Cooren *et al.,* 2011; Hardy & Thomas, 2015; Iedema, 2003; Kuhn *et al.*, 2017; Orlikowski & Scott, 2015; Phillips & Oswick, 2012), and expands such perspectives by combining their insights with new materialist theorizing in order to better understand middle management as a constitutive process and an ongoing becoming of discursive-material forces materializing in precarious practices in everyday work. In doing so, I draw on the feminist writings of Karen Barad (2003, 2007), whose work has formed another key inspiration for this dissertation by reconceptualizing entities as relations that emerge in/through a mesh of agencies, with consequences for how I am able to approach the precarities and complexities of becoming middle management. As such, the contributions I develop here respond to calls made within the literature for studies resting on processual assumptions to produce insights into specific processes of constitution (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

In the next sections, I will briefly discuss the wider context for my research, followed by my research questions. I then continue by outlining the purpose of this dissertation and exploring some of the key theoretical inspirations and concepts. In the final pages of this chapter, I will present the contributions made by this study and close with a description of the dissertation's structure.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As the first part of this introduction has revealed, I was initially intrigued by what seemed to be a rather messy and complex middle management life, in which middle

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[2] The concept of organizing, as used in this study, denotes processual and performative perspectives on organizing as the mode of being of organization (Robichaud & Cooren, 2013).

management practices were clearly tied to those of being a teacher. This, at times, made their positions as middle managers blurred and conditioned by what appeared to be more than just a formal title or job description. These circumstances framed the initial curiosity that motivated the study and, as such, informed my search for ways to investigate this middle management position that would take into account its blurred, informal, constantly negotiated and often undefined 'nature'. One way to proceed is to examine this position in processual terms as an ongoing 'becoming' that emerges in/through everyday practices, rather than a fixed position. This allows for a recognition of the subtleties and blurriness that are (also) constituting of phenomena, in this case, their middle management position. Approaching middle management in this way, I combined constitutive perspectives within organizational discourse studies (Iedema, 2003; Kuhn *et al.*, 2017) with new materialist theorizing (Barad, 2003, 2007). These theoretical inspirations informed my research and led me to formulate the research questions that guided my study:

How are middle management positions becoming, discursively and materially, across daily work practices in selected primary and lower secondary schools? With which performative effects on the teacher as a middle manager?

Supporting questions:

- *How can I develop empirical methods that are sensitive to the discourse-materiality relations shaping middle management positions?*
- *Through which identity work are new middle management positions emerging?*
- *And through which organizing processes is the work of middle managers becoming?*

The three articles that constitute part of this dissertation provide an answer to the first part of the overall research question and more specifically focus on answering the three supporting questions.

The second half of the overall research question will be addressed in the dissertation's concluding chapter, where I pick up on discussions of the performative effects on the teacher as a middle manager by reading across the insights produced throughout the chapters of the dissertation and the three article contributions.

1.4. EMPIRICAL FIELD: PUBLIC EDUCATION REFORMS AND ORGANIZINGS IN DENMARK

In a Danish educational context, the Folkeskole translates to *the people's school* and refers to state-funded primary and lower secondary schools. This public school system

consists of an obligatory pre-school class, compulsory classes 1 to 9, and an optional 10th class. In the summer of 2013, a majority vote in the Danish parliament agreed on a comprehensive national policy reform (UVMa, 2013) with the overall purpose of strengthening academic standards in order to enable all children to achieve their full potential (UVMb, 2014).

Clearly, this policy reform was developed with inspiration from leading trends and discourses within international educational research communities, and particularly the scholarship adhering to School Effectiveness Research (Reynolds *et al.*, 2014). This research tradition is influenced by governance forms of New Public Management (Ferlie *et al.*, 1996) in its aim to streamline and modernize the educational system – a tendency that has spread across the educational system in Denmark over the past two decades (Bergmann & Plotnikof, 2018; Jacobsen, 2013a; Plotnikof, 2016; Pors, 2012). This manifests, for example, as an increased focus on participation and performance in international education ranking systems, such as PISA, and evidence-based practices.

As a means to succeed in improving public schools, several measures were highlighted in the policy programme. For the pupils, this involved changes including a longer school day and more weekly lessons in core subjects, such as Danish and mathematics.

Organizationally, the reform resulted in emerging expectations that school management would have a more direct connection to and responsibility for the level of student outcome. As such, they were foregrounded as key actors in implementing the policy reform and thereby improving public schools – not only were they expected to lead more and better, but also in new ways (Pors, 2014). As a consequence of these developments, selected teachers came to play a significant role in supporting school management by becoming a pivotal organizing force and a link between local management ambitions, policy reforms, teachers, students, classrooms and parents. This increases the teachers' organizational responsibility and raises expectations of them helping to organize local expertise. Effectively, this produces a greater focus on headteachers, team leaders and other organizationally 'attuned' positions in which teachers hold formal or informal degrees of leadership responsibility, and thus, perform as middle managers. This view corresponds with one understanding within management studies, which defines a manager as someone who has a job that places them in charge of a particular task and, although only informally leads co-workers towards development in regard to this particular task (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016).

This dissertation empirically investigates how these selected teachers become in this position and perform it, and the implications thereof. I conducted fieldwork at two public schools in a municipality close to Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark, throughout the autumn and winter of 2018/2019. During the fieldwork, I followed five

middle managers in their everyday enactment of this position as it entangled with their (primary) position as teachers.

1.5. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore *how* new middle management positions emerge through the organizing processes by which the work of middle managers becomes, and through their identity work. As such, I develop a rethinking of middle management by which I aim to extend critical and discursive perspectives within middle management research, inspired by organizational discourse studies and new materialist theorizing.

The study focuses on *how* middle management positions become – and thereby materialize – as opposed to *why* they do so, and by implication I focus on how 'things' come together in this materialization. As such, the relations between 'things' are foregrounded. As a consequence, no one thing, whether it be hierarchical structures, formal role descriptions, discourses, politics, culture, materiality etc., can be taken given in the process. Accordingly, this perspective aims to avoid notions of predefined entities of, for example, middle management, and it thus provides a relational way of exploring how multiple agentic forces produce the phenomenon in question. Thus, in this study I am not invested in proposing a more correct or pure depiction of middle management, nor do I wish to contribute with a normative conclusion as to whether the local empirical framing of the middle manager and the efforts to create an improved school are desirable or meaningful – that is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Instead, I am devoted to investigating such framings seen as effects of the national school reform. That is, I seek to explore how they manifest and perform themselves as particular forms of organizing and what kind of becomings they enable for the actors involved.

One way of approaching this purpose is by understanding middle management through the performativity of multiple agentic forces. In this way, I am able to consider the becoming of middle management as manifestations of everyday work and see the underlying dynamics of such becoming. As such, the purpose of the current study is to offer an empirical investigation that builds on 'thick' and embodied data concerning the everyday work of middle managers. Thus, it reflects a form of knowledge production that pursues direct experience with the research topic and the generating of new data, as opposed to analysing or synthesizing extant scholarship, as in the case of armchair theorizing.

1.6. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL RESOURCES: CONCEPTS AND INSPIRATIONS

I extend critical perspectives and specifically discursive approaches to the field of middle management, in particular by developing a new materialist perspective, thereby adding a strong focus on materiality to discourse, and offering a constitutive perspective to challenge the more static conceptualizations found in middle management literature. In doing so, I develop an approach that is sensitive to how multiple agentic forces partake in processes of constitution in organizing and managing. I thereby aim to better understand middle management as a constitutive process and an ongoing becoming of discursive-material forces.

I engage with critical branches of management and organization studies, emphasizing organizational discourse studies (ODS) (Ashcraft *et al.*, 2009; Grant *et al.*, 2004; Hardy & Thomas, 2015; Orlikowski & Scott, 2015; Phillips & Oswick, 2012), including the theorizing communication-as-constitutive perspective (CCO) (Ashcraft *et al.*, 2009; Cooren *et al.*, 2011). Particularly within the literature of ODS/CCO, discourse (and communication) is highlighted as producing the realities of organizational life (Ashcraft *et al*., 2009). This perspective rests on the assumption that discourse is more than a matter of linguistics (Iedema, 2003, 2007; Kuhn & Putnam, 2014; Kuhn *et al.*, 2017; Phillips & Oswick, 2012; Putnam, 2015). That is, discourse is more than the spoken or written word – it is, in fact, (often) with reference to a Foucauldian notion of discourse, that which is and enables what can be said. This clearly does not only involve linguistics, but also materialities, such as objects, bodies, time, space, politics, culture etc. (Hardy & Thomas, 2015; Plotnikof, 2015; Plotnikof & Pedersen, 2019). In other words, discourse is understood through a 'materialist lens' and these perspectives therefore readily connect with what has been called the discourse *as* materiality position (Philips & Oswick, 2012) and demonstrate a turn to materiality that has slowly been developing throughout the past twenty years (Cooren, 2020).

Indeed, these assumptions challenge the so-called 'great' divide between discourse and materiality – the divide between the so-called material world (technology, tools and artifacts) and the so-called social world (meanings, discourses and cultures). Instead, with recent inspirations from new materialism, claims of interdependency between discourse and materiality have been advanced; "there is no social that is not also material, and no material that is not also social" (Orlikowski, 2007, p. 1437). Such assumptions produce a shift towards focusing on the relations, or relationality, of discourse and materiality, rather than on either/or dichotomies (Iedema, 2003; Kuhn *et al.*, 2017). This point is associated with agential realism, put forward by Barad (2003, 2007, 2012, 2014), who captures this relational process through the concept of intra-activity (Barad, 2003), highlighting the mutual constitution of the agency of discourse-materiality. In this way, the ability to act emerges within this relationship.

Inspired by Barad's theorizing in combination with the above literature, I have developed a theoretical framework, upon which the current study builds. This has enabled me to consider the often-messy process of *how* multiple 'things' (discourse, politics, bodies, materiality etc.) come together, entangle and produce particular phenomena, which moreover opens up ways of understanding the significance of such entanglements, that is, an understanding of that which comes to matter, or makes a difference (Barad, 2007). In summary, these theorizings offer a conceptual framework for conceiving the constitutive dynamics of the ongoing becoming of middle management.

Evidently, this framework also stipulates certain methodological concerns, and particularly the conceptualization of discourse-materiality relationships as multimodality (Iedema, 2003, 2007; Plotnikof & Zandee, 2016). Also inspired by Barad, this conceptualization has helped me to develop empirical methods that embrace the messy entanglements of 'stuff', or discourse-materialities, that are characteristic of the empirical field, as the concept draws our attention to the co-constitutive 'nature' of discourse-materiality and the multiple agentic forces that form meanings and matter. As such, a multimodal focus demands a sensitivity towards the multiple agentic forces (human, non-human, verbal, non-verbal) that are at play while conducting field work. This has manifested as a retooling of ethnographic field methods, which will be elaborated in Article One.

In this dissertation, the becoming of middle management primarily concerns the identity work and the development of particular time- and space- 'bound' work practices, or forms of organizing, when becoming in the middle. To examine these materializations further, I have also been inspired by studies of identity construction, and particularly processual and performative perspectives within this scholarship (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Harding *et al.,* 2014; Hultin & Introna, 2019), as well as the concept of liminality and its recent appropriation by broad organization studies (Ellis & Ybema, 2010; Johnson & Sørensen, 2015; Söderlund & Borg, 2018; Ybema *et al.*, 2011). Both bodies of literature will be unfolded in "Chapter 4: Theory", as well as in connection with the writing of Articles Two and Three.

1.7. CONTRIBUTIONS

This dissertation contributes by extending and expanding critical and discursive perspectives to the field of middle management developed at the intersection of organizational discourse studies and new materialist theorizing. This has resulted in the following specific contributions:

The focus of this study is on how new middle management positions become in/through the situated practices of everyday work. Such a focus enables

investigations of middle management in processual terms, allowing for explorations of the constituting dynamics that emerge as middle management positions. This involves engaging with the continual discursive-material forces that are materializing such ongoing becomings, including the more informal constructions of middle management. This doctoral study makes a contribution to the field of middle management by developing an approach inspired by organizational discourse studies and new materialist theorizing. This leads to the understanding of middle management as an emerging becoming, rather than a static position. Thus, it rethinks notions of hierarchy and formality, and shows how such becomings materialize within the precarious practices of everyday work.

Firstly, in developing this approach, the research argues for a particular framework for innovating empirical methods and data modes, and as such, the strengthening of a methodological focus across critical branches of management and organization studies. Accordingly, the study also responds and contributes to ongoing debates around discourse-materiality relations, particularly within organizational discourse studies, including the theorizing communication-as-constitutive perspective (Article One).

Secondly, the research demonstrates two contributions to the field of middle management. The first concerns the struggling identity work of middle managers and, in line with the suggested approach above, I develop an analytical approach to better understand their ongoing, emerging identity work in new materialist terms. The study breaks with static notions of identities and instead offers empirical insights into the identity work of middle managers as something that is always in the act of becoming. As such, I show how discourse-materiality works to perform identities, thereby elucidating the identity construction process as one of identity intra-activity and the producing of particular entanglements associated with those of a middle manager playing out simultaneously with the practices of a teacher (Article Two).

Thirdly, the research demonstrates an analytical contribution of middle managers' work practices. Once again, echoing the framework described above, the study shows how viewing middle management work as a becoming that emerges in/through everyday practices, rather than a form of hierarchical organizing or a formal position, we get to see that this position is characterized by particular liminal work practices, which are sometimes contradictory and call for particular liminal competences for which the middle managers are unprepared (Article Three).

1.8. DISSERTATION STRUCTURE

Chapter 2 introduces the research context of this dissertation and the specific forms of organizing developing as becomings of middle management positions in the local government that makes up the empirical setting.

Chapter 3 reviews the historical and theoretical developments in the middle management literature relevant to this study, paying particular attention to a focus in the early literature on conceptualizing middle management in hierarchical terms. Responding to this early research, I commence by presenting three strands of literature that construct middle management in certain ways: from a prescriptive, a descriptive and lastly an interpretative perspective. The chapter concludes by highlighting the potential for expanding the interpretative literature through the development of a constitutive perspective to the study of middle management, taking inspiration from organizational discourse studies and new materialism.

Chapter 4 explains the key theoretical inspirations that have influenced my research and play a part in producing the overall research apparatus, including the development of the analytical strategy. These inspirations are developed from critical branches of management and organization studies, in particular organizational discourse studies combined with new materialist theorizing. As such, the concepts I have used are presented and then discussed in terms of their implications for investigating middle management positions as constitutive processes and ongoing becomings.

Chapter 5 describes the methodology of this research. The first part details the overall research design, the ontological and epistemological viewpoints and the methods developed. The chapter also illustrates the ways in which I generated and managed the data. The second part includes the **first article** of this dissertation: *Retooling methods for approaching discourse–materiality relations: A new materialist framework of multimodal sensitivity* (Dille & Plotnikof, 2020).

Chapter 6 presents the dissertation's empirical analyses in the form of two articles. The first of these, corresponding to the **second article** in this dissertation, is entitled: *Advancing a Baradian perspective on the field of identity work: An empirical analysis of the complex discourse–materiality identity construction* (Dille, 2020). The **third article** is entitled: *Unpacking the ambiguous work of middle managers: On the ongoing becoming in liminality*.

Chapter 7 concludes the findings and moreover discusses the performative effects on the teacher as a middle manager by reading across the insights produced throughout the chapters of the dissertation and the three articles. On the final pages of this dissertation, potential implications for future research are highlighted.

CHAPTER 2. RESEARCH CONTEXT

2.1. LOCAL GOVERNMENT'S ORGANIZINGS OF REFORM

In this chapter, I will introduce the research context of this dissertation, and specifically the forms of organizing developing in the local government that makes up the empirical setting. The research I conducted takes the everyday practices of teachers as middle managers as a case study. This case study is a multi-sited ethnography (Falzon, 2016) of two public schools' efforts to improve school practices by enhancing the functions of middle managers. Performing multi-sited research allowed me to explore the emerging and changing forms of organizing – with their local differences and nuances. This was done not in order to compare or generalize across schools, but rather to investigate the situated particularities and ways of enacting the becoming of this middle management position – the phenomenon in question in the current dissertation – and thus create a 'thicker', complexity-sensitive set of data.

As highlighted in Chapter 1, above, due to a recent policy reform (UVMa, 2013), school management teams across Denmark are facing new and increased expectations to produce more efficient public schools by, for example, practising school management 'closer' to the classrooms. This has led to rethinking the functions of teachers in middle management positions. Within local government, this rethinking manifests in local school policies, [3] but develops slightly differently at the school level. Therefore, in this dissertation, policy reforms, both local and national, are constituted as contexts alongside the field contexts of the two schools – they are all ways to explore middle management becomings as a multi-sited phenomenon.

The slightly different forms of organizing concern, for example, the responsibilities of middle managers, their organizational 'labels' as learning consultants, impact coaches or curriculum facilitators, as well as their level of influence on their school's goals and direction, among other things. Despite variations, what they have in common is that these teachers are no longer merely carrying out support functions, such as giving advice to colleagues on particular curriculum-related matters or student concerns. Rather, they are tasked with co-leading their colleagues, although informally, towards an improved school (Bilde & Nielsen, 2016); for example, by entering colleagues' classrooms and facilitating changes with regard to honing teaching practices. This development reflects a shift in the approach used to achieve better student outcomes, as teaching practices are now the focus of attention. This shift in approach rests on the assumption that, by supporting teachers to develop better

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[3] Regardless of local authority, all primary and lower secondary schools in Denmark are regulated by the Folkeskole Act, which is a regulation at the national level that provides an overall framework for schools' activities (UVMc, 2018).

teaching practices, you support better student outcomes. The teachers holding middle manager positions are often in charge of facilitating this mission (F. B. Andersen, 2002).

The two schools that make up the field contexts of this dissertation are located in a middle-sized town with a local government in the region of Zealand. The town has grown significantly in population throughout the past fifty years and accordingly the number of schools has grown. The town consists of highly developed housing areas as well as more rural areas. This variation is reflected in the size of the schools, with rural schools tending to be quite small in terms of the number of students and staff. The physical locations of the two schools adhere to these variations; thus, I name the following sections and the local developments as the 'village school' and the 'city school'.

The two schools are both organized hierarchically and are led by a formal management team consisting of a school principal and vice principal. As a part of the organizational structure, both schools have what may be considered a 'resource task-force', which consists of selected teachers who, besides teaching, also have other organizational responsibilities. For example, translating strategic visions for the teaching staff by giving presentations, providing coaching, or mentoring, of colleagues, participating in strategic development workshops with school management etc. Depending on the size of the school, these responsibilities are divided between several teachers; thus, within the smaller, village school where there are fewer 'hands', teachers holding middle management positions typically enact several organizational responsibilities. Whatever their levels of responsibility, in this study, I follow the everyday practices of these teachers and focus in particular on their interactions with/in the school environment. This includes interactions with other staff, such as school management and colleagues, as well as students, but it also includes interactions with all the other 'stuff' in schools: books, coffee cups, classrooms, posters, technologies, discourses, specific 'times', such as lunch breaks and transition-times from breaks to classrooms etc. In short, the actors participating in this research are clearly the subjects, or human actors, in the schools, but also the non-human actors – the other stuff.

In the following sections, I will introduce the two field contexts and present the concrete empirical forms of organizing developing. The two introductions commence with short contextualizations that situate the developing forms of organizing in the local realities of the two schools. They are developed on the basis of generated data. As the dissertation will go on to show, tracing these forms of organizing as they unfold was my focus when conducting fieldwork.

Further methodological considerations regarding issues such as the multi-sited ethnographic case study as a research method, research participants, generating data etc. will be considered further in "Chapter 5: Methodology".

2.1.1. THE VILLAGE SCHOOL

The village school lies on the outskirts of the town, surrounded by a few housing developments, but mainly vast stretches of fields. In close proximity, there is a village with a small pond, a grocery store and a bakery. Most of the school's students live close by in the village, as do many of the teachers. The school offers a one-year preschool class, followed by grades 1–9, with two classes per grade. The total staff, including teachers, administration, management and maintenance adds up to around fifty people, and is thus the size of an average school in Denmark.

There is a village feel when entering the car park. First of all, it is easy to gain an overview of the school's buildings, including the playground, which is located right outside the teachers' lounge. There are big windows facing the playground, so the staff can still keep an eye on the buzzing activity while on their breaks. In general, there is a sense of close proximity between teachers and students. On my first visit to the school, and my first meeting with the research participants, I arrive in the middle of lunch. The playground is filled with students playing soccer or catch and small clusters of children simply hanging out. Inside, there is also a lot of free movement, play, laughter and generally a high level of noise in the hallways. In accordance with the building style of the 1970s and '80s, the ceilings are a little lower than those in more modern schools, so the sounds of school may appear louder and more 'condensed'. As with the students, a lot of teachers are moving around, resolving conflicts, telling students to keep their voices down, or not to run inside, making last minute preparations before the beginning of the next lesson, escorting students to the administrative area, where you can get a band aid, filling coffee cups, popping into the principal's office to ask a question or having quick conversations with colleagues. This latter is an energetic mixture of professional talk about students, parents or new school initiatives and private talk about weekend plans, spouses, kids, cars etc. Clearly, this buzz is not unique to this school, but what is distinctive is the village feel produced by the size of the staff and the architecture, the surrounding fields, the feeling of close proximity between teachers and management, but also between students and teachers. For instance, I noticed that the teachers, and management, seemed to know the names of all the students passing by.

A framework for differentiated instruction

At the village school, the middle managers often have many middle management responsibilities and thus more than one 'label'. For example, they might be both a learning consultant *and* an all-school literacy consultant. This multi-tasking means that the middle managers seem involved in and knowledgeable about pretty much all new organizing initiatives concerning school improvement, whether it be evaluation protocols, facilitation of professional learning centres, the development of all-school literacy policies, supervision of colleagues etc. By implication, these managers spend a lot of their working hours, when they are not teaching, in different collaborative

forums with school management. As such, they are depicted as pivotal partners of management in regard to school improvement. They are 'all-rounders', so to speak, because they have a pristine knowledge of the 'floor' as well as the interior of the strategic apex and thus in various ways help qualify new school initiatives:

> There is no doubt that the middle managers are a support to school management. For example, I talk to them about whether it is meaningful to roll out the school-improvement plan this way. Or whether it makes sense to introduce this and that to the teaching-staff ... My expectation of them is that, since they are teachers themselves, they have a greater feeling of what goes on amongst their fellow teachers than I do. (Interview, vice principal, February 2019)

During my fieldwork, the two middle managers from this school who participated in the dissertation's research were particularly involved in implementing a new protocol for teachers concerning practices of differentiated instruction, also referred to as a framework for differentiated learning (see e.g., Tomlinson, 1999). This framework involved a practice whereby teachers would refine the tailoring of their instructions to meet individual student needs and hence deliver lessons at varying levels of difficulty. This protocol was an all-school initiative entering its second year, but with only selected grades participating each year. The programme had been developed by the two involved middle managers and specifically targeted the strengthening of teacher collaboration across grades in order to facilitate differentiated instruction and thus enhance student outcomes.

Accordingly, this process of implementation produced new forms of organizing, with the middle managers now in charge of 'boosting' their colleagues' teaching practices, as opposed to boosting student abilities – the latter focus being a previous and more common approach to creating better student outcomes. By way of example, the middle managers would sometimes have to perform observations of colleagues' teaching, followed by a meeting in which they would address and comment on the observed lessons, as well as assisting with the following organizing of students into different academic levels. Furthermore, they would help to articulate a common process plan, goals, ways of evaluating etc. Subsequent to these introductory steps, the middle managers would continue to be involved by arranging mid-process meetings with the respective teachers concerning progression, challenges, success stories etc. and generally make sure that the overall process was on track. This involved checking up on whether the teachers, during the everyday bustle of work, would commit to the agreements made amongst themselves at the beginning, whether there were any challenges in terms of collaboration, whether the students were responding desirably etc. And finally, at a concluding meeting, the middle managers would facilitate development and coordination in relation to the evaluation of the proposed goals and student outcomes, as well as a process evaluation of the collaborations amongst the teachers and amongst the teachers and middle managers.

As indicated above, the two middle managers would often play a rather active role during these meetings with the classroom teachers. This further manifested in the fact that they would produce the agenda, keep track of time and take notes on computer as to what was said and agreed upon. Sometimes, they would be the ones filling out the teachers' process plan, that is, the mandatory documentation of goals, activities, evaluation etc. Last, but not least, they would offer suggestions as to how the teachers could organize their teaching schedules to accommodate this differentiated instruction. As such, the middle managers were very hands-on in indicating the structures, goals and developments that were needed. This would often challenge the pre-existing culture around collaboration and traditions of non-interference in teachers' teaching practices, since they were requesting that the teachers open the door to their classrooms and let other professionals in. These included colleagues teaching the same grade, but also colleagues in the shape of the middle managers.

Although the everyday work of the middle managers would in general take place 'on the go', that is, in hallways, at lunch, or in colleagues' classrooms, they would also make use of a meeting room, which was usually used by the school management team, in order to prepare or hold meetings with colleagues. This room was located in the school's administrative area, right next to the vice principal's workspace.

2.1.2. THE 'CITY' SCHOOL

The 'city' school is located directly in the town centre and although it is not a large urban area, which is why the word city is in quotations, it is similar in size and atmosphere to many suburban towns in Denmark. The city centre consists of a small shopping complex with a couple of big grocery stores, fast food restaurants and small boutiques. Close by is the town hall and the local high school, as well as the train station. As such, the city school is located in a rather busy milieu and for this reason you will typically see older students and teachers spilling out of the school during breaks to buy coffee, sandwiches or treats at the local stores in the shopping complex next door.

The school offers a one-year preschool class, followed by grades 1–9 With a total staff of around 100 and three classes per grade, the school is considered large in a Danish context.

Spread out across a large site surrounded by different play areas designated for different age groups, the city school is, at first encounter, a bit of a maze. The school's size is reflected, not in terms of height and multiple stories, but rather in the many trailing buildings and intersecting hallways leading to areas designated for different grade clusters, which can loosely be referred to as the elementary, middle and junior years. Clearly, this school has a scent of childhood and youth, which involves playing, running, yelling, laughing, backpacks thrown down in the hallways and paintings made by students filling the walls, but the 'evidence' of this is rather spread out.

During breaks, the hallways are not overly busy and noise is not overly amplified. This is most noticeable when you enter the main building, because the students' play is, in general, located away from the entrance area. This is where you will find the teachers' lounge and the administrative areas, where school management works, as well as the library. Thus, you will have to explore the buildings a bit to really get a sense of the number of students attending this school. By implication, there seems to be a distinction between adult-occupied areas and student-occupied areas. This means that, since the teachers' lounge is a little removed from the school buzz, students do not seem to enter this lounge during breaks, nor do I see them in the administrative area wanting to call home because of illness or needing a band aid.

A programme for enhancing teaching practices
Due to its size and thus the number of students to be attended, the city school has quite a few middle managers in what they colloquially term their school 'taskforce', which consists of teachers with different areas of expertise and related organizational responsibilities. The middle managers in this taskforce are typically only in charge of one area of concern; for instance, all school-literacy development, or evaluation policies. This means that the school has chosen to spread these responsibilities around, and therefore it has quite a few people serving as a form of school improvement resource. The taskforce members meet with the vice principal on a regular basis and share thoughts, ideas and experiences related to their school interventions in order to best coordinate their efforts, share knowledge and coordinate particular events or future school initiatives. Hence, this is where the primary collaboration between management and middle managers unfolds.

As within most Danish schools, the middle managers have traditionally directed their attention towards the students. However, as mentioned in the previous section, this focus has been increasingly redirected towards the development of teachers, or, more precisely, towards their teaching practices. During my fieldwork, this manifested in a programme aimed at supporting teachers across all grades to develop their practices on the basis of observation. In relation to this redirection of focus, vice principal, Kirsten explains:

> ...we [ed.: management] would like to challenge the notion that the focus should be on the students. The focus should be on the teachers. The teachers are the driving force behind learning processes, so they are the ones needing to be 'probed' or challenged a bit. (Fieldnotes, October 2018)

As part of this programme, middle managers were tasked with enhancing or probing the overall 'professional pool' of the school by instigating conversations with their colleagues about learning, evaluation, classroom management techniques, differentiated instruction etc. in light of a classroom observations. As implied in the

above quotation from the vice principal, Kirsten, this development hinges on a belief that, in order to develop, teachers need to be willing to discuss their teaching and theories of practice, reflect with co-practitioners as to why they do the things they do and also sometimes be challenged on those beliefs. This task requires the middle manager to facilitate processes of reflection for/with colleagues, rather than giving answers:

> The focus is now redirected and what you [ed.: middle managers] have to do is to facilitate these reflection processes about relevant teaching practices. Not to point fingers, but in order for it to become legitimate to talk about each other's practice... You [ed.: middle managers] are closer to practice – at least closer than we are, and we are here today to talk about how you can partake in developing the whole 'shop' [ed.: the city school]. (Fieldnotes, principal addressing middle managers at a workshop, October 2018)

The three middle managers from this school who participated in the dissertation's research were all involved in the delivery of this programme. At the time of the fieldwork, the programme was in its second year and still evolving and being refined while it unfolded. This meant that the vice principal would have meetings with the involved middle managers in order to discuss developments, concerns and potential alterations.

Concretely, the programme was designed as a (minimum) three-step process, initiated by a pre-meeting between the middle manager and relevant teacher to discuss points of development and a focus for the observation. At this stage, the middle manager would ideally have the teachers themselves identify areas of concern in order to ensure that the desired outcome would match their needs. For example, some teachers would ask for feedback on their ability to better include the 'quiet' students or input on how to best manage noise, academic levels etc. This preamble involved making a contract of collaboration between the middle manager and teacher, including goal setting, date of execution etc. Following this, the middle manager would observe one or two lessons and attempt to be a 'fly in the wall' during those lessons. This means that, even though the middle manager was in his/her natural habitat and accustomed to attending to students, hushing them, instructing and so on, she/he would refrain from doing so and would usually sit at the back of the room taking notes. As the final stage of this programme, the middle manager and teacher would have an evaluation meeting, where points from the observations were discussed, mainly relating to the agreed-upon foci and developmental goals. Then, a plan for progression was drawn up by the two parties, including the possibility of conducting yet another round of observation and feedback. The knowledge produced as a part of this process was subsequently documented and shared with school management.

Clearly, this programme produced new forms of organizing, which challenged previous assumptions about the 'targets' of improvement. In this case, the targets were the teachers, with the middle managers in charge of strengthening these teachers' practices, similarly to the village school, but with a greater emphasis on observation. Other forms of organizing also manifested, because the middle managers were also expected to challenge some of the beliefs and methods of their colleagues during follow-up meetings, including offering suggestions about how to improve and progress from the status quo.

2.2. SUMMARIZING NOTES

The forms of organizing developing as becomings of middle management, broadly speaking, involve a shift in the targets that middle managers are expected to address. This concerns a shift away from supporting students towards supporting teachers – thus complying with recent trends for achieving improved student outcomes. As mentioned above, this trend rests on the assumption that, by supporting teachers to develop better teaching practices, you support improved student outcomes. As described in the previous sections, this trend developed as two forms of organizing at the respective schools: a framework for differentiated student instruction and a programme for enhancing teaching practices. Despite variations, both initiatives put the middle manager in charge of a redirected focus on colleagues' teaching practices, with the aim of improving overall school efficiency.

Indeed, these forms of organizing have certain implications concerning, for example, particular work practices or struggles with matters of identity. I will explore these further in the remainder of the dissertation, and in particular in Articles Two and Three.

CHAPTER 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to review relevant literature on middle management, including existing definitions, developments and pivotal discussions on how best to investigate the work of middle managers. As such, the review emphasizes the relationship between advanced theoretical frameworks and the subsequent implications for studying and thinking about middle management. This emphasis brings to the fore an acknowledgment of middle management as a construct that is dependent on a particular theoretical lens and/or research focus. Clearly, this does not only apply to the concept of middle management, but also to all other concepts that, in this case, concern the middle manager, such as organizational hierarchies and middle manager roles/positions.

Below, I present three strands of literature that construct middle management in certain ways, thus affecting the knowledge produced and research practices: a prescriptive, a descriptive and, lastly, an interpretative perspective on middle management, to which this dissertation offers contributions (which is why this section is also lengthier than the first two). I contribute to this field of research by expanding the interpretative strand through the development of a constitutive perspective on the study of middle management, taking inspiration from organizational discourse studies and new materialism. The following review is based on literature searches, which are explained methodologically in Chapter 5.

Much has been written about middle managers and middle management, and the field is burgeoning, and has been for decades, with contrasting views and a great variety of foci and theorizations. Determining how to grasp and organize this variety is by no means an easy task; hence, the following review is the product of a series of choices made with reference to the research focus of this dissertation. This means that, first and foremost, my review is hardly exhaustive, but rather I present an avenue, or a particular reading of the literature, with the purpose of positioning my PhD project within the field of middle management and, additionally, with a bearing on the overall research question.

Although this review is the product of a particular reading, and thus has a narrow scope, I begin it in a broader manner by outlining some of the historical and theoretical developments within this literature that are common touchstones in much of the middle management literature and shape (and are shaped by) the particular reading that I present. For that reason, this review commences by painting – in broad strokes – an 'origin story', which is also a 'hierarchy story', of middle management, with the purpose of establishing the foundations for understanding the theoretical and empirical developments relating to the current study. To this end, the review is structured around the following subsections: 1) Then came the middle manager – an 'origin' story, 2) prescriptive, 3) descriptive, and 4) interpretative perspectives, 5)

Readings across constructions of middle management, 6) Positioning of the PhD project and summarizing notes.

3.1. THEN CAME THE MIDDLE MANAGER – AN 'ORIGIN' STORY

The field of middle management is a development within the broader field of management and organization studies – a subfield that is deeply entangled in this literature and the explorations of managing organizations. Historically speaking, the field of management studies includes a body of knowledge, skills and competences related to the activity of managing and a research interest in investigating what management, in fact, is – how it should be done and what skills/competences are needed (Cunliffe, 2009). Such perspectives associated with managing are often described as mainstream, or conventional, management perspectives, because they are the most common tales told about management, both in research and education textbooks, and in popular literature (Cunliffe, 2009; Tengblad, 2012). Although, more of an 'offspring' or niche story, alternative and more critical work has evolved, promoting a destabilization of management studies by challenging much of the research within this conventional way of thinking. These perspectives are typically embraced by a body of literature referred to as critical management studies (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000).

Indeed, this management literature, whether it be mainstream or taking more critical perspectives, provides foundational conceptualizations and theorizations when middle management begins to develop as a field, commencing in the 1950s (Burns, 1957) and as it continues to develop extensively, particularly throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Dopson & Stewart, 1990; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1994, 1997; Mintzberg, 1989; Newell & Dopson, 1996; Nonaka, 1994; Peters, 1994; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Shorris, 1981; Thomas & Dunkerley, 1999).

From the outset, definitions of middle management materialized to a high degree as a certain position within the organizational hierarchy (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997) and was, more often than not, merely a category describing the organization and hence not the primary focus (Mintzberg, 1989; Thompson, 1967). By implication, *the* main definition of middle management was thus that it was a position executed above some and below others. This means that definitions were primarily concerned with what I coin as the 'whereabouts' of middle management in relation to other organizational actors.

Alongside Burns (1957), and grounded in social and behavioural sciences, Thompson's influential work (1967) on the nature of organizations is one of the earliest studies to pinpoint the middle manager. In his work, he puts forward the above definition of middle management when he distinguishes between three levels, or

layers, of an organization: a technical (operational), a managerial and an institutional (strategic) layer. According to Thompson, middle managers operate 'within' the managerial layer in a mediating position between the other two layers.

Although approaching the phenomenon of middle management from a management and business perspective, as opposed to Thompson's (1967) sociological starting point, Mintzberg's likewise influential work (1980, 1983, 1989) identifies different levels within an organization. Mintzberg describes these levels as every organization's basic parts: the strategic apex, the middle line, the operating core, the technostructure, the support staff and the ideology (Mintzberg, 1989). The position of the middle manager is defined within this structure according to its middle levelness "...between the operating core and the apex" (Mintzberg, 1989, p. 89).

Although the field grows expansively following Burns (1957), Thompson (1967) and Mintzberg (1983), and becomes entangled with other fields and manifold interests related to the working life of middle managers, concerning, for example, their identity work (e.g. Harding *et al.*, 2014), their strategic value (e.g. Floyd & Wooldridge 1992, 1994; Huy, 2001), their changing role (e.g. Dopson & Stewart, 1990; Peschanski, 1985; Uyterhoeven, 1989;), there seems (for the most part) to be a consensus in the literature that defining middle management relates to their whereabouts: where (within the organization) is middle management? This definition is still a predominant touchstone to which studies will refer to when investigating manifold research interests in relation to middle management. As I will argue later in this review, one implication of such a definition in early studies is that defining middle management in terms of its location within an organizational hierarchy may lead to fixed or static understandings of middle manager positions and work and may prevent us from exploring middle management beyond hierarchies.

Deviations from these lines of definition are seen in more recent literature, where scholars question these classifications as given and call for more context-sensitive definitions (Ainsworth *et al.*, 2009; Currie & Proctor, 2005) with added attention to our constructions of middle management (Thomas & Linstead, 2002). This is argued to be because 'being in-between' two layers on an organizational chart, when enacted locally, might involve other, more hybrid, informal or fluctuating, management forms in practice.

While this section has attempted to briefly outline the commencement of the field of middle management, including highlighting a focus on hierarchy in early research, the purpose of the following three sections is to distinguish between different modes of attention, or constructions of middle management, that developed in part as a reaction to these conceptualizations of middle management in terms of hierarchy and related notions of a static position.

3.2. PRESCRITIVE PERSPECTIVES

As highlighted above, some of the earliest studies present a 'hierarchy story', rendering middle management a question of clearly demarcated hierarchical positions and locations. This conceptualization led to the development of perspectives focusing on rational and formal aspects of work and promoting notions of best practice, effective planning, decision-making and control. This strand of studies generally takes inspiration from mainstream management studies and is concerned with identifying good versus bad middle management practices. They then commonly offer suggestions for how to achieve good, or successful, middle management (cf. best practice) (Burgelman, 1983; Currie & Proctor, 2001; Huy, 2002; Kanter, 1989).

A lot of this research reflects evaluations of 'the state' of the middle manager, implying that there is, in fact, a clear, distinct 'state' that is either gloomy or prosperous (e.g., Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990). Clearly, this literature does not challenge the hierarchical conceptualizations posited by some of the early studies; rather, it appropriates and ascribes facticity to the proposed concepts (Thomas & Linstead, 2002). This suggests that the middle manager is conceived of in entity terms, as an *a priori* entity of existence – a 'given' stratum of the organization and, for some, a dispensable layer producing organizational 'fluff' (Grey, 1999; Peters, 1994; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Scarborough & Burrell, 1996; Semler, 1993). For others, a valuable linking pin (Likert, 1961) or a layer connecting tacit and explicit knowledge (Nonaka, 1994). However, a stratum that, in order to fully develop, requires certain techniques or adherence to management models.

This literature rests on assumptions based on a so-called planning-oriented approach (Tengblad, 2012, p. 9), which argues using linear and rational forms of reasoning and dominated the field of management studies for some time, particularly during the 1970s and '80s (e.g., Keys & Bell, 1982; Luthans *et al.*, 1988; Organ, 1971; Peter, 1979; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Ruello, 1973). Thus, the literature can be described as prescriptive, and much of the work within this strand is based on functionalist perspectives on management, "...which aims to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of managers and their organizations..." (Cunliffe, 2009, p. 3). As such, this literature describes what managers should do and, furthermore, what skills they need to possess in order to do so. For instance, they need to develop skills to manage tacit and explicit knowledge or navigate within an inherent role ambiguity, and, relatedly, develop the ability to communicate and collaborate both laterally and horizontally (Currie & Proctor, 2001; Delmestri & Walgenbach, 2005; Fenton-O'Creevy, 2001; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1994; Huy, 2001, 2002; Nonaka, 1988, 1994; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990;).

To sum up this section, within this prescriptive literature, middle management predominantly becomes a question of best practice, reflecting a conceptualization of middle management as given state, an *a priori* entity; that is, a hierarchical form of

organizing and a formal position with distinct features that can be probed or moulded in particular ways to achieve certain outcomes.

3.3. DESCRIPTIVE PERSPECTIVES

The second strand of literature explores the mundane work of middle managers and therefore proposes a shift in attention to the day-to-day practices, activity patterns and work content, as opposed to a focus on, for example, formal techniques or prescriptions (Tengblad, 2012). Tengblad & Vie (2012) therefore argue that this literature offers an alternative approach to managerial work due to its focus on work as a social practice – a perspective with roots in management and work behaviour research (e.g., Carlsson, 1951; Kotter, 1982; Mintzberg, 1973, 2009; Tengblad, 2002, 2006). This research is typically critical towards some of the more prescriptive literature, and particularly the so-called superhero stories, or great man theories, since these are seen as an over-simplistic portrayal of managers (e.g., Mintzberg, 2009) and managerial realities – instead, managerial realities rest on assumptions of instability:

> There are no stable equilibriums or precise forecasts in the world of management. In complex and changing systems, where many actions have unintended consequences, it is not possible to determine outcomes in advance. (Tengblad, 2012, p. 9)

Thus, from this perspective, literature is concerned with life lived 'as it is', full of uncontrollable processes, and so middle management becomes a question of messy realities, not suitable for one-size-fits-all models. As an example, Watson (2000, 2001), shows how, more often than not, rather than acting on clear objectives and plans, middle managers spend their time managing relationships, both laterally and horizontally. Others show that middle managers spend most of their time engaged in politics, negotiations and informal talk (Burns, 1957; Lupton & Horne, 1965). The findings within this research are therefore based on descriptions of what middle managers actually *do* with their time within the complex and unstable realities that make up contemporary organizations. Indeed, this literature presents rather different perspectives on managerial work, than the prescriptive, or functionalistic, literature.

First and foremost, this practice-oriented literature contradicts some of the early presumptions of middle managers as passive linking pins in the organizational hierarchy (e.g., Drucker, 1988; Simon, 1960). Instead, this research show that they in fact enact a key mediating layer – between the operational and strategic levels – translating instructions and strategic directions (Mintzberg, 1989; Sillince & Mueller, 2007). Despite these mediating and cross-cutting 'properties' highlighted by this literature in terms of the middle manager, I argue that, although implicit, much of the research within this strand continues to put forward a conceptualization of middle

management as a position defined by its location in the midst the organizational hierarchy. As a consequence, middle management is still conceived of in entity terms as a static position, and thus somewhat reduced to a phenomenon that is structurally and empirically determined, as within much of the prescriptive literature (Scarbrough, 1998).

While much of this research manifests as a counterweight to the prescriptive literature in the form of research foci on instability, informality and the complexity of everyday work practices, a significant focus remains the extent to which the managerial work of middle managers has changed since Burns' (1957) first study (e.g., Tengblad & Vie, 2012) – thus, reproducing, in great parts, notions of hierarchy and 'whereabouts' and assumptions of the middle manager in entity terms. Comparable to my argument above, this results in a definition of middle managers that is based on their location within the hierarchy. Hales (2005), for example, argues that the function and position of the middle manager is a relatively stable one, despite the massive restructuring of organizations and new ideals of decentralization and delayering that emerged during the 1980s and '90s (Kanter, 1989; Whittington *et al.*, 1999). He claims that the position "exhibit[s] remarkable stability over time and across organizations" (Hales, 2005, p. 501), putting forward notions of the middle manager as *a* position, *a* role. This means someone possessing more or less clear general properties, including the characteristics of their position and function, as well as their whereabouts within the organization.

As such, it can be argued that the focus on middle management as a form or state is still retained to a certain extent within the descriptive literature. This means that, even though this literature challenges the 'reality' of middle managers by putting forward descriptions of messy everyday lives consisting of events and tasks other than planning, decision-making and control, the position is still conceptualized on the basis of a formal hierarchical position and location.

3.4. INTERPRETATIVE PERSPECTIVES

The final strand of work continues to challenge the prescriptive literature by bringing to the fore the effects of middle management and portraying middle management work as it is experienced and understood by middle managers themselves (e.g., Harding *et al.*, 2014; Sims, 2003; Thomas & Linstead, 2002). This body of literature aims to demonstrate the 'unofficial' and ambiguous aspects of (middle) managerial life, and predominantly comprises of literature invested in discourse-informed perspectives on management (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020; Harding *et al.*, 2014; Rouleau, 2005; Rouleau & Balogun, 2007; Thomas & Linstead, 2002; Watson, 2008; Watson & Harris, 1999). Although it can be argued that research on the experience of 'life in the middle' is rather inconclusive, there does seem to be

some consensus on the aforementioned ambiguity; that is, the blurriness, contradictions, tensions and paradoxicality that middle managers experience (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020; Tengblad & Vie, 2012). Thus, the literature demonstrates that managing from the middle is an ambiguous and precarious endeavour, with various effects in terms of, for example, identity work and different forms of organizing, including the development of particular work practices. In the present study, I explicitly contribute to both research areas (cf. "Chapter 6: Analysis").

A body of literature that is particularly well developed within this strand concerns the identity work of middle managers (Ainsworth *et al.*, 2009; Dille, 2020; Down & Reveley, 2009; Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020; Harding *et al.*, 2014; Linstead & Thomas, 2002; Musson & Duberley, 2007; Pullen, 2006; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016; Thomas & Linstead, 2002; Watson, 2008). These studies stress multiple ambiguous aspects related to a position 'sandwiched' in the middle (e.g., Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020; Sims, 2003), or in-between the levels within an organizational hierarchy (Ybema *et al.*, 2011), and they show how this work involves, for example, having to navigate contrasting expectations, discourses and logics stemming from both above and below. Moreover, they emphasize how middle managers experience conflicting values, as well as struggles and tensions regarding feelings of alliance – all matters, it is argued, that potentially generate self-doubt, leading to a questioning of professionalism and worth.

Although studies on identity work generate critical claims highlighting middle management as inherently ambiguous, a great deal of the above-mentioned literature still explores middle managers in entity terms. Thus, by implication, the experienced work of middle managers is, at least implicitly, understood with regard to a spatial discourse and imagery (Ainsworth *et al.*, 2009) – they are 'sandwiched' (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020), 'stuck' (Redman *et al.*, 1997) or 'muddled' (Newell & Dopson, 1996) in the middle. As such:

> Middle managers are defined by what they are not – not the shop floor and not top management – which leaves them occupying a vaguely-defined 'middle ground' where their status and affiliations are dependent on the meaning of both extremes. (Ainsworth *et al.*, 2009, p. 8)

Accordingly, Ainsworth *et al.* (2009) remind us that, in a great deal of the literature, middle management is a spatial construction of someone in *a* location: a middle. This is a view that has influenced the way in which we understand and think about middle management and the identity work of middle managers in entity terms. That is, the struggles and tensions relate to being stuck, muddled or sandwiched in-between the shop floor and top management, whereas recognizing this spatial construction opens up the possibility of studying the life of the middle manager in more dynamic terms, for example, as practices, rather than in terms of their location or as an organizational

layer. Comparable to Ainsworth *et al.*'s (2009) line of inquiry, Thomas and Linstead (2002), some years earlier, argue similarly, as they call for an awareness of the facticity we ascribe to concepts that are, in fact, socially constructed, such as a spatial discourse. However, the research focus presented in these two studies is an exception within this literature, rather than the norm.

Although less well developed as a research focus within this strand compared to the literature on identity work, scholars have also foregrounded the work practices of middle managers, focusing on the contradictions and tensions emerging out of these (e.g., Azambuja & Islam, 2019). This focus is often investigated through the concept of boundary work. It provides an insight into the ambiguous and paradoxical effects of the interstitial and cross-cutting practices that middle managers find themselves enacting, leading some scholars to talk of middle managers' work as a boundary-crossing activity, or boundary-spanning work (e.g., Ashforth *et al.*, 2000; Balogun, 2003; Iedema *et al.*, 2004; Mintzberg, 1980; Paulsen, 2014). Relatedly, the interstitial aspects of managerial work are also explored through the concept of liminality (Söderlund & Borg, 2018; Turner, 1969) and although the primary bulk of this research has not been appropriated by middle management literature, a few scholars have started to apply this lens when trying to describe the ambiguity and uncertainty emerging from the work practices of job holders with various degrees of middle management responsibility, including more informal aspects of managing (Borg & Söderlund, 2014; Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003;Ybema *et al.*, 2011). This generates a focus relating to everyday, situated and emerging doings and practices. Although it talks of work as a boundary-spanning and liminal activity, opening up the possibility of conceptualizing middle management in more dynamic terms (Jackall, 1988), this literature does not quite let go of the notion of middle management as a structurally determined position.

Exceptions to this are explorations of more of less distributed and shared forms of leadership and related ambiguous aspects (Denis *et al.*, 2012). However, most of this literature redirects the unit of analysis towards different leadership constellations. These include a focus on shared leadership in groups, or triads or leadership as a means to achieve a specific outcome and, thus, do not specifically investigate middle management, although it can be argued that a middle manager would be present as part of these constellations. This literature concerning distributed leadership is particularly developed within the field of education (Spillane, 2006).

Within research resting on interpretative perspectives, middle management becomes a question of tension, struggle and ambiguity and is primarily viewed as the discursive effects of managerial work when 'stuck in the middle'. As such, this literature elucidates the experience of a 'crossfire of pressure' relating to the situated, everyday practices and identity work of middle managers. Although the greater part of this literature is based on discourse approaches, conceptualizations of middle management still predominantly reproduce a spatial discourse of the middle manager and a broad

research interest in the crossfire between layers of the organization. As such, the middle manager is conceptualized as a position *in* tension and struggle, but yet still *a* hierarchical (sandwiched) position, an entity, in a particular location – above some and below others.

3.5. READINGS ACROSS CONSTRUCTIONS OF MIDDLE MANAGEMENT

The three perspectives developed in this chapter construct middle management in certain ways. Thus, they enact forms of responses to some of the early studies concerning hierarchical conceptualizations of middle managers within the field. Clearly, these constructs have led to different effects on the knowledge produced. In other words, they (re)shape our theories, concepts and how we think about middle management. The purpose of the chapter has been to review these perspectives within the literature in an attempt to distinguish between different responses, or 'modes of attention', and their implications for the study of middle management. That is, the review has sought to explore what middle management becomes a question of and the implications of this in order to make clear the current PhD project's primary contribution. In doing so, I demonstrate how, although diverging greatly in their responses to the early literature, the various perspectives mainly rest on entity notions regarding hierarchy, position and location. The problem with this, which this study will address, is that, in our investigations of middle management, we risk losing sight of the manifold other constituting forces, besides the organizational structures and formal job descriptions, that play a role in constituting middle management. By implication, we are thus prevented from seeing the significance of this other 'stuff' which, whether subtle or tangible, is yet very real. This includes the more informal constructions of middle management and their manifestations within organizational life. I will go on to explore these aspects, in the remainder of the dissertation, and particularly in the article contributions.

When reading across the three perspectives, it is clear that early hierarchical conceptualizations of middle managers has led to diverging responses to such claims. Within in the prescriptive body of literature, perspectives were generated that focus on the rational and formal aspects of middle management work. Thus, the literature promotes notions of best practice regarding, for example, the development of certain negotiation techniques, particular planning skills or decision-making models. One implication of such a research focus is that middle management is conceptualized solely in entity terms, as structurally and empirically determined 'in' a formal hierarchical position 'within' a clear organizational location in-between.

Challenging notions of rationality and best practice, the descriptive literature adopts a lived-life perspective and investigates what managers actually spend their time

doing. This research describes managerial life as anything but rational; in fact, it demonstrates that middle-management work, more often than not, involves messy relationships and a lot of conversations, rather than clear-cut planning activities and easy decision-making processes. Although this literature is critical of the prescriptive perspectives on managing and presents a messier reality, the work of middle managers is still predominantly described as a particular 'being', that, indeed, muddles along in instability, mediates and cuts across layers, yet manages from *a* middle. Although more implicit than within the prescriptive literature, these conceptualizations of the middle manager as 'a being' in-between, imply that middle management work continues to rest on assumptions of middle management as a fixed state.

Parallel to the descriptive literature, research taking an interpretative perspective continues to challenge the functionalistic and prescriptive literature. It likewise highlights mess as a reality premise, but views it as the discursive effects of middle-management work manifested as the experience of struggle, tension and ambiguity. This research conceptualizes middle management as a position caught in an ambiguous crossfire consisting of pressures from both superiors and subordinates. And although these significant contributions elucidate the mesh of 'forces', such as discourses, politics, expectations and practices that become established as ambiguous effects, the middle manager is still conceptualized as a position that is 'locked' into a hierarchical middle of pressures from above and below; structurally determined in terms of the organizational hierarchy.

Indeed, this is where the present PhD study pick up the threads and proposes to let go of such a hierarchical structure by expanding the premise such that we may understand the becoming of middle management in/through the discursive effects that establish *as* middle management. Thus, by extending the focus on the discursive effects that establish *as* middle management, I 'leave' the interpretative repertoire and echo more processual and performative perspectives on middle management (Ainsworth *et al*., 2009; Linstead & Thomas, 2002; Pors, 2016) by introducing a constitutive perspective to the study of middle management (Barad, 2003, 2007; Brøgger, 2018; Iedema, 2003; Kuhn *et al.*, 2017; Orlikowski & Scott, 2015). This perspective privileges studies that view phenomena, here middle management, as something that is in motion, an ongoing becoming. This perspective is invested in what constitutes a becoming of middle management and is inclusive about what is encompassed and what matters in this process, that is, what holds agency in this process. This means that agency is an active 'force' constituting middle management realities.

3.6. POSITIONING OF THE PHD PROJECT AND SUMMARIZING NOTES

At the beginning of this chapter, I introduced an 'origin', or 'hierarchy', story of middle management. In doing so, I demarcated how the field of middle management is deeply entangled with theories and conceptualizations that have developed within the broader field of management and organization studies. As a consequence, middle management has, from its origins, been investigated through an organizational lens. This has led to studies of middle managers as mere 'bricks', or layers in an organizational chart. That is, they have been conceptualized as a fixed and static space in-between the shop floor and the strategic apex. As highlighted in the previous section, the current study seeks to challenge such notions by introducing a constitutive perspective on middle management. A 'becoming' perspective, rather than a 'being' perspective. The latter refers to a conceptualization of middle management as an *a priori* entity of existence – a formal hierarchical organizing and position.

Thus, in this PhD project I explore middle management, not in relation to a predefined being within an organizational structure, but rather as something more fluid, context sensitive and emerging in/through multiple forces – a mesh, or mess, of discourses, politics, policies, expectations, relations etc. – that become established as middle management. This is not to say that middle managers do not exist within an organizational hierarchy; rather, I propose that such an 'exclusive' view reproduces somewhat realist assumptions about middle management *in* prescribed hierarchical constructions. This sets a certain premise for, and thus limits, how we can study and understand middle management as more than hierarchies and structures. By proposing a constitutive perspective, I argue that we get to see the continual constructions, the mess and mesh and negotiations, including the informal constructions of middle management, that are materializing a becoming in the middle – which is not (only) an absolute level within the organizational hierarchy.

Thus, this dissertation's contribution specifically involves extending and expanding critical and discursive perspectives on middle management, which is approached as a phenomenon in movement, and investigated with a thinking that rests on assumptions developing in the intersection of organizational discourse studies and new materialist theorizing. However, besides offering an extension of theorizations of middle management, my ambition is also to contribute with empirical research of the lived 'reality' of middle managers. For this reason, my findings have been developed on the basis of an ethnographic inspired field study of lived middle management life. Thus, I offer empirical insights into specific constitutive processes in a field with relatively few empirical studies resting on such processual assumptions (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). The goal of this dual ambition is that it will sharpen our understandings of the situated, extremely messy and complex practices of middle management, as well as the performative powers of the multiple agentic forces

involved in the becoming of middle management, including the effects and significance of such becomings.

CHAPTER 4. THEORY

In this chapter, I will turn to the key theoretical inspirations that have influenced this study and thus play a part in producing the overall research apparatus, including the development of the analytical strategy. Hence, the purpose of the chapter is to present the theories and concepts that I have employed in configuring the overall knowledge production by intersecting organizational discourse studies and new materialism.

The previous chapter concluded that research on middle management is to a large extent informed by assumptions that conceptualize middle management in entity terms, as fixed; that is, as structurally determined by a hierarchical organizing related to the formality of the position. However, the literature also shows that, in fact, the empirical realities are far more messy and fluid, which points to middle management as something more context-sensitive and negotiated (Currie & Proctor, 2005; Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020). Some scholars have started to address this messiness by foregrounding middle management as constituted in/by discourse (Ainsworth *et al.*, 2009; Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Harding *et al.*, 2014; Linstead & Thomas, 2002; Thomas & Linstead, 2002). Here, I echo, yet expand, these developments and use the significant insights produced to draw further attention to the constitution processes that underlie the phenomenon of middle management. I am thus able to challenge the presumed hierarchical organizing and position of middle management, which is still implied in most of the discursive literature, by applying theoretical frameworks that in fact encompass the constituting dynamics emerging as middle management positions. In doing this, I advance a constitutive perspective on middle management, which allows me to explore the continual becomings of middle management that are materializing. This entails tracing the discursive movements/constructions, but also a tangle of other social and material elements, such as materialities, space, relationships, culture, politics, tasks, structures etc., that come to perform the becoming of middle-management positions.

Thus, the investigation I propose involves an analytical strategy that is sensitive to how *multiple* social and material elements entangle, co-constitute each other and thereby come to perform in specific ways locally. In doing so, I build upon insights from the ongoing debates within critical branches of management and organization studies, and particularly organizational discourse studies (ODS) concerning the (over-)emphasis on discourse at the expense of materiality – a perspective that is developing as a response to the defining of discourse as primarily a linguistic matter (e.g., Ashcraft *et al.*, 2009; Grant *et al.*, 2004; Iedema, 2011; Mumby, 2011).

Affected by these ongoing debates, recent conceptualizations have begun to foreground the relationship, or relationality, of discourse and materiality (Ashcraft *et al.*, 2009; Kuhn & Putnam, 2014; Phillips & Oswick, 2012; Putnam, 2015). One string of efforts exploring these relations that is still developing takes inspiration from new materialism (sometimes termed sociomateriality) (Cooren, 2020; Hardy & Thomas,

2015; Iedema, 2007; Kuhn, 2020; Kuhn *et al.*, 2017; Orlikowski & Scott, 2015). These advancements have likewise had great significance for the ways in which I approach my research and develop my strategy. In the following section, I will introduce the key discussions and developments relating to such constitutive perspectives on organizational life and the implications of these efforts.

The abovementioned attention towards relationality within ODS, and in particular the work influenced by new materialism, takes inspiration from the work of feminist theorist Karen Barad (2003). This theorizing builds on agential realism, from which the research apparatus used in this study draws its primary inspiration. Two major concepts in Barad's work have been particularly valuable when developing field methods and the overall analytical strategy: the concept of intra-activity (Barad, 2003) and its performative implications, and the concept of spacetimemattering (Barad, 2014), which involves what could be considered the 'queering' of time and space. I describe these conceptualizations and briefly outline Barad's overall framework in the following sections. However, this is not a comprehensive introduction to broad new-materialist work, nor is it a comprehensive introduction to the work of Barad. Rather, it is a way of showing how I and other discourse scholars have utilized particular aspects of her thinking. It is also a way of illustrating how such thinking can contribute to the expansion of discourse-materiality debates within broad organization studies, including middle management studies, because her theorizing prompts us to ask different kinds of research questions. This concerns, for example, asking *how* 'things' come together, that is, *how* relations of 'things' produce realities – and with what effects. These contrast with, for example, research questions asking *why* – which (often) incite binary types of answers and 'solutions'.

Consequently, the introduction to Barad's work, as well as to constitutive perspectives within organizational discourse studies, given below will reflect such epistemological concerns, but it will also reflect the selections I have made that have certain material effects – some things are foregrounded, while others are downplayed, or left out. Thus, to apply Barad's thinking, what I offer in this chapter is a certain agential cut (Barad, 2003), a version, and as such a *way of seeing* that is actively organizing the/my world (Haraway, 1988) – and by implication materializing the analytical strategy that I put forward. What is implied here is a particular researcher practice that draws attention to the implications of certain theoretical choices (N.Å. Andersen, 1999). That is, certain theoretical framings will always be made at the expense of other framings, as will the 'slice' of reality I produce. This is why explaining my choices and the underlying assumptions becomes relevant to the claims I am able to make.

In the following sections, I will introduce the inspirations and discussions that are developing within critical branches of management and organization studies. I will emphasize organizational discourse studies, including the recent contributions of new materialism that are relevant to this study and the development of my analytical strategy. As already mentioned, this includes a brief introduction to the rising new

materialist conceptualizations of such discussions, and particularly the work of Karen Barad.

Next, I will describe the analytical strategy and the explicit focus on concepts concerned with the co-constitution of discourse-materiality. Following this, I will further specify the analytical strategy by explaining the concepts related to the focal points of analysis in Articles Two and Three. This includes identity scholarship within organizations, and particularly the concept of identity work, as well as the concept of liminality and its appropriation by organizations studies.

4.1. ORGANIZATIONAL DISCOURSE STUDIES: INSPIRATIONS AND DEBATES

Scholars have been affected by the growing influence of research on organizational discourse (Cooren *et al.*, 2014; Grant *et al.*, 2004; Phillips & Oswick, 2012;), and have been devoting increased attention towards the constituting role of discourse in organizational processes. This development has emerged in the wake of the linguistic turn in the social sciences (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000), highlighting the ways in which, language is constituting of, rather than reflecting, organizational life (Hardy *et al*., 2005). Hence, the notion of discourse as it applies here is tied to an organizational context and seeing organizational phenomena "as the result of processes of social construction carried out through the production and dissemination of texts of various kinds" (Phillips & Oswick, 2012, p. 4). Such a perspective provokes certain epistemological concerns that challenge the notion of organizational phenomena as 'given in nature'. Instead, it highlights that organizations and related phenomena are no longer conceived of as mere objects. Rather, they are 'talked into being', shaping and shaped by discourse, always perspectival and contestable and thus grounded in a social constructionist epistemology (Gergen, 1999).

Turning to the concept of discourse, organizational discourse scholars are increasingly defining discourse in terms of two (sometimes overlapping) interests; one concerns a focus on 'language in use', referring primarily to dialogue or conversation as it appears in both talk and text. The second interest lays particular emphasis on written text and concerns discourses as interrelated ideas and their evolution over time, as well as their affect on the (organizational) context in which they occur (Phillips & Oswick, 2012, p. 10). These definitions lead to discourse-oriented research that involves:

> ...analysis of collections of texts, the ways they are made meaningful through their links to other texts, the ways in which they draw on different discourses, how and to whom they are disseminated, the

methods of their production, and the manner in which they are received and consumed. (Phillips *et al.*, 2004, p. 636)

With reference to this quotation, texts take on a broader meaning in a great deal of discourse-oriented research, in the sense that it refers to both spoken and written forms, including, for example, pictures, documents, speech acts and symbols (Grant *et al.*, 1998). Thus, texts become the symbolic representation of what is, in fact, being said, written or depicted. This assumption brings to the fore the materiality of texts in the sense that the textual elements are what embody discourse; thus, they are what gives discourse its material form (Taylor *et al.*, 1996) in the particular social context in which it occurs. Such context awareness highlights the fact that most discourse analyses are also concerned with how context affects texts and vice versa, as well as the effects that these texts have within the social context in which they occur (Phillips & Oswick, 2012). In terms of the everyday life of organizations, this highlights that discursive practices; "...do not just describe things; they do things" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 6). Although this rather broad conceptualization of discourse as texts comprising various forms of symbolic inscriptions, such as practices, pictures, written text and bodies, the analytical contributions tend to be narrower and often reduced to the linguistics, despite this rather 'inclusive' conceptualization. As briefly mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, discussions regarding this issue do exist in the literature and have furthermore generated a greater interest in the relationality of discourse and other elements, such as materialities, affect etc. I will return to these discussions and developments below.

Although there seem to be somewhat of a consensus around defining discourse-oriented work in terms of the two broad interests identified above, the types of discourse analysis practised under the banner of ODS vary a great deal. This has led to discussions about how best to approach organizational phenomena within a discursive framework. For example, some scholars argue for an approach based on a particular discursive method of investigation, e.g., conversation analysis (see for example, Fairhurst & Cooren, 2004) or point of analysis, e.g., identity (see for example, Maguire *et al.*, 2001). Another approach, which has prompted influential discussions, broadly speaking concerns a level-based delineation of micro (situated talk, or readings of single texts) versus macro (grand narratives, or mega-discourses such as capitalism) types of analysis (Oswick, 2012). Discussions regarding this issue originate in part from the early mapping of discourse-based work developed by Alvesson and Kärreman (2000) and their follow-up piece (2011) – in which they develop a critique of the use of discourse in the field. In these two articles, they put forward the notions of 'little d' (or text-focused studies), referring to the micro-level of interest, and 'big D' (or paradigm-type discourse studies), referring to the macro-level, as a way to broadly categorize this multifaceted body of literature.

In their mapping, Alvesson and Kärreman (2000, 2011) address the question of whether discourse should be restricted to talk and texts (cf. the above broad definition

of text) or whether it should in fact incorporate other forms of meaning-making, such as practices, relations and materiality. From their perspective, discourse often becomes too inclusive – too muscular in a sense – and accordingly: "come[s] close to standing for everything, and thus nothing" (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000, p. 1128). Hence, the two authors argue in favour of cutting the concept of discourse down and narrowing the scope of analysis to, for instance, a focus on text, thereby contributing to defining discourse in linguistic terms.

These claims have generated eager debates (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2011; Hardy & Grant, 2012; Iedema, 2011; Mumby, 2011), as well as substantial developments concerning the conceptualization of discourse, including the relationships between discourse and other material aspects of organizational life (Hardy & Thomas, 2015; Kuhn & Putnam, 2014; Kuhn *et al*., 2017; Phillips & Oswick, 2012; Putnam, 2015). In particular, what has developed in the wake of these debates is an entirely different sensitivity towards materiality, centring on how the material acquires meaning through its relationship with discourse. In effect, from this perspective, materiality is constructed through a complex web of discourses, practices, power relations etc. (Mumby, 2011), which means that discourse and materiality are always staged together and are intractable aspects of everything that exist (Iedema, 2007; Kuhn *et al.*, 2017). Hence, these assertions challenge the sharp distinction between discourse and materiality proposed by Alvesson and Kärreman (2011), and thus transcend a tendency in the literature of the past to downplay the role of materiality in favour of discourse in a language-restricted sense (Phillips & Oswick, 2012).

Discourse *as* materiality
The developments outlined above correspond with what Phillips and Oswick (2012) describe as the discourse *as* materiality position, which highlights the position of discourse in relation to materiality as one of co-constitution. This means that discourse and materiality are conceptualized as constitutive forces of organizations and organizing when relationally joined (Hardy & Thomas, 2015; Kuhn & Putnam, 2014; Mumby & Plotnikof, 2019; Putnam, 2015; Thomas & Hardy, 2011; Thomas *et al.*, 2011). Scholars engaged in in such perspectives, typically take their inspiration from Foucault (1994) and thus are particularly invested in looking at the effects of discursive and material practices:

> It is this fusion of the discursive *and* the material that generates the power effects of discourse and allows for change to occur (or, alternatively, prevents it from happening). It is through practice that bodies, spaces, and objects acquire meanings and become 'visible'; and it is through practice that material movement occurs as bodies, spaces, and objects are constantly being rearranged. (Hardy & Thomas, 2015, p. 690, original emphasis)

Resonating with a co-constitutive conceptualization of discourse and materiality, the concept of multimodality, as opposed to mono-modality, allows for an understanding of discourse (Iedema, 2003, 2007) that implies an inquiry extending beyond a language-restricted focus by embracing all forms of meaning making, i.e., multimodalities. This means that the concept of discourse encompasses manifestations such as spoken and written language-in-use, but also practices, materiality, relations, space, discourses, bodies etc. (Hardy & Thomas, 2015; Iedema, 2003; Plotnikof & Zandee, 2016). Multimodal discourse thus rests on the assumption that the empirical field does not come as mere delineated text; rather, it presents itself as an organizational complexity of "messy entanglements with energies and materialities" (Iedema, 2011, p. 1167). These entanglements are embodied by 'all the other stuff' that relates to and takes part in the phenomena under investigation. In relation to the current study, this relates to, for example, the heightened emotion in a room; what is said and what is left unsaid; tones of voice; the relationships between participants and accordingly the field of possibility to respond, contest or agree. But it also relates to more tangible 'stuff', such as specific spaces, or rooms, furniture, technologies, books, bodies etc. This 'turn to' multimodality takes inspiration from Barad (2003), who sees the material and the discursive as mutually implicated, a point to which I will return in the next section.

The discussions and developments outlined above, and particularly the concept of multimodality, have helped me to facilitate an embodied research practice that is sensitive to precisely these entanglements as potential means of agency co-constituting middle management positions. An unfolding of how multimodalities work to materialize organizational phenomena in practice, such as middle management, is developed in Article One, which is included in "Chapter 5: Methodology".

Recently, scholars have begun to frame the conceptualization of discourse and materiality as a framework that rests on relationality (Ashcraft *et al.*, 2009; Kuhn & Putnam, 2014; Phillips & Oswick, 2012; Putnam, 2015). As such, they focus attention on the relations, rather than, for instance, bodies/people or things. This means that all forces, or actors (both human and non-human), are potential means of agency, since agency lies in the relationships. As a consequence of this, forms of organizing such as middle manager practices only exist within particular relations and are constantly (re)enacted and emerging. Some of the literature expressing this sensitivity towards relationality, and having particular relevance to this study (Hardy & Thomas, 2015; Iedema, 2007; Kuhn *et al*., 2017; Orlikowski & Scott, 2015), likewise, take inspiration from new materialism, and particularly the work of Barad (2003). The posthumanist version that Barad represents is typically considered to be more radical among relational ontologies, since she does not recognize materiality or discourse as

ontologically distinct entities; rather, they only become 'something' when combined – they are features of the same whole (Barad, 2003)[4].

Communicative constitution of organization perspective
Connecting renderings with related notions of agency and relationality, some scholars specifically theorize communication as the interactional process through which discourse and materiality fuse via texts and conversation, producing networks of organizing. Such efforts typically rely on a communicative constitution of organization (CCO) perspective (Ashcraft *et al.*, 2009; Cooren *et al.*, 2011; Kuhn & Putnam, 2014) and have a strong interest in materiality not subordinated to discourse, particularly within its 'Montreal School' (e.g., Cooren *et al.*, 2008; Cooren *et al.*, 2011; Schoeneborn *et al.*, 2019; Taylor & Robichaud, 2004). Within CCO, this interest in agency is likewise present because it is suggested that: "...what constitutes an organization is a hybrid of human and non-human contributions" (Cooren, 2004, p. 388). This means, that what people do through communications is constitutive of organizing/organization (Cornelissen & Kafouros, 2008; Cornelissen *et al.*, 2008). As a whole, these efforts can be seen as reworking organizational communication as an:

> *...ongoing, situated, and embodied process whereby human and non-human agencies interpenetrate ideation and materiality toward meanings that are tangible and axial to organizational existence and organizing phenomena*. (Ashcraft *et al.*, 2009, p. 34, original emphasis)

What this quotation suggests is that organizations and forms of organizing are nothing in themselves; they do not exist as natural phenomena, or natural structures, separate from human activity. Instead, they are the physical manifestations of human activity, of communication. Communication, then, is all there is, and with CCO's broad definition this entails multiple 'things'; documents, pictures, architecture, space, technology, furniture, symbols, narratives, talk and more. This means that the continual interaction between many forms of communication is what constitutes organization/organizing (Cooren *et al.,* 2011), which foregrounds a notion of agency within the interaction of multiple 'things'. As such, the developments foregrounded by CCO contribute with a perspective on how, through communicational actions and events, discourse and materiality are co-implicated and co-constitutive of organizations and organizing – thus, elucidating that communication has performative effects.

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[4] Other bodies of literature that apply a relational approach include, for example, Actor-Network Theory (Callon & Latour, 1981; Callon, 1986) and Affect Theory (Massumi, 1995; Hemmings, 2005; Stewart, 2007; Rice, 2008).

Hence, a CCO framework resonates with recent conceptualizations within organizational discourse studies of discourse and materiality as mutually constitutive (Iedema, 2011) and hence a discourse *as* materiality position (Phillips & Oswick, 2012). Through its focus on organizations and organizing as dynamically constituted in communication – thus emphasizing 'what is ongoing' – the framework also offers a form of processual thinking about the becoming of phenomena that has inspired my work both methodologically and theoretically. Methodologically, because I have committed to following the constituting processes of middle management through time, in a five-month field study, and through space, that is, at different geographical sites, in different contexts both at work and off work (the latter via log writings) and in transitions between contexts (this will be further elaborated in "Chapter 5: Methodology"). Theoretically, since it offers a conceptual framework that is sympathetic to a process perspective and thereby allows me to conceive of the constitutive dynamics of phenomena. Or, put differently, drawing inspiration from a CCO perspective, as well as 'aligned' theorizing within organizational discourse studies, I direct my analytical attention towards the relationality of discourse and materiality as part of ongoing organizational processes. This means that I am able to investigate how relations 'do', or perform, middle management, which has provided the basis for developing a relational approach to my study. I will further elaborate on this particular approach in "Section 4.3: Approaching middle management".

In the following section, I will further specify the concepts of discourse and materiality, their relationship and related implications through the theorizing of Barad (2003, 2007). Thus, I will be utilizing a thinking and a vocabulary that has informed and inspired some of the abovementioned developments within organizational discourse studies and greatly influenced my study.

4.2. TURN TO MATERIALITY

In this section, I turn to the theorizing of Karen Barad (2003, 2007, 2008, 2014), including a brief introduction to the overall framework of agential realism, as well as an outline of her concepts of intra-activity and spacetimemattering – both of which have informed my research. Throughout this section, I will draw upon the work of Barad herself, but I will also include work from other organizational scholars who have used her theorizing.

Karen Barad is an American physicist, a professor of feminist studies and the creator of the transdisciplinary theory agential realism (2007), a theorizing that relates to the study of practises of knowing in being, that is to say, an ontological and epistemological fusion – onto-epistemology (Barad, 2007, p. 829) – often encompassed by the term 'new materialism'. She holds a PhD in particle physics, and draws inspiration and concepts from multiple fields, including the quantum physics

of Niels Bohr (1885–1962), poststructuralism and the work of philosopher Michel Foucault (1926–1984), queer theory represented by Judith Butler (1990) and Donna Haraway's (1997) feminist science and technology studies. In her work, Barad undertakes readings across fields and concepts, and it is on this basis that she has developed her theory and framework for investigating the entanglements of matter and discourse as materializations of phenomena.

Mobilized particularly in organizational research by Orlikowski (2007) and Orlikowski and Scott (2015), Barad's theorizing has been a stepping-stone for taking materiality more seriously in empirical studies of organizational life. This involves not subordinating materiality as a mere effect of human intentionality – and hence assigning primacy to human agency – in the investigation of organizational realities. In fact, in an agential realist account, materiality is an equally active force in the constitution, or materialization, of phenomena (Barad, 2003, p. 827). The active participation of both human and non-human forces is therefore imperative. By implication, this theorizing articulates an ambition to overcome the divide between the so-called material world relating to technologies and artifacts, and the social world, i.e., discourses, meaning and cultures. In the words of Orlikowski (2007, p. 1437), this means that "...there is no social that is not also material, and no material that is not also social".

Corresponding to some of the other scholars mentioned earlier, who devote attention to materiality (e.g., Hardy & Thomas, 2015; Iedema, 2007), Barad draws upon a Foucauldian notion of discourse. This means that discursive practices are not merely speech acts or linguistic statements – since that would be the enactment of a representationalist form of thinking – rather, a discursive practice is "...that which constrains and enables what can be said" (Barad, 2007, p. 146). Barad develops this Foucauldian notion of discourse by further theorizing the relationship of the discursive and the material, and suggests that in order for 'something' to exist it must be materialized. Or to put it differently, 'reality' is an ongoing process enacted in practice (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Accordingly, practices are considered as ontological, and thus constitutive of reality. The specificity of a materialization will then refer to that which comes to matter or makes a difference in a particular enactment – in practice. Discourse and materiality play into these practices, they 'run' through them, so to speak, coming together in certain ways, and at any given time, they are what practices have made them (Taylor, 1993).

By considering discursive-material practices as constitutive of reality, Barad directs our attention towards the material effects, or the performativity, of discourse-materiality (Orlikowski & Scott, 2015). This illustrates the way in which her theorizing goes beyond a representational belief and questions of correspondence between linguistic descriptions and reality. Thus, what Barad puts forward is a performativity theorizing – an imperative awareness of the differences that discursive-material practices make – how they matter. In her own words:

> I offer an elaboration of performativity – a materialist, naturalist and posthumanist elaboration – that allows matter its due as an active participant in the world's becoming, in its ongoing 'intra-activity'. It is vitally important that we understand how matter matters. (Barad, 2003, p. 803)

Before I turn to the neologism 'intra-activity' in the next sub-section, it is particularly pertinent to address the point of matter, or mattering in relation to Barad's notion of performativity, inspired by Butler (1990). This is because a large part of her theorizing is invested in drawing attention to our scholarly practices and how we account for that which we observe. This is fundamental to her diffractive methodology (Barad, 2007, p. 88), which argues, in line with the above, that our research does not just reflect a given reality, but rather it is performative, producing particular versions, or in Barad's words different 'agential cuts' (Barad, 2003, 2007), that make a difference, that matter. It is worth noting that 'matter' has a dual meaning in Barad's thinking, referring to that which is of significance, that which is materialized (i.e., comes to exist), as well as 'stuff', i.e., things such as bodies, spaces, objects etc. (Kuhn *et al.*, 2017). By making such claims, Barad stresses that our scholarly activities create traces in the world that make a difference to what we learn and understand about, for example, middle management, which holds certain performative effects for future scholarship, and indeed also for practitioners. I will connect back to these ethical considerations in "Chapter 5: Methodology".

Returning briefly to the notion of performativity and perspectives on power. By building on Butler's account of performativity (1990), and thus Foucault's analytics of power (1980, 1982), Barad is invested in analyses of power relations, as her thinking accentuates *how* constitutive forces have performative effects. This means that power is clearly not something that someone possesses; rather, it is generating of reality through the constituting relationality of discourse-materiality. Clearly, such a focus on the constituting dynamics and effects highlights Barad's anti-representationalist thinking, as she stresses that discourse consists not merely of spoken or written words, but it is that which enables and constrains what can be said – what counts as meaningful (Barad, 2003, p. 819). This notion of performativity has been important when demarcating the approach and analytical strategy that I put forward when investigating the becoming of middle management positions, which involves a sensitivity to how discourse-materiality entangle and co-constitute each other, and thereby come to perform locally in specific ways.

Intra-activity
The concept of intra-activity constitutes as a rethinking of the notion of interaction: "...which presumes the prior existence of independent entities/relata" (Barad, 2003, p. 815), vis-à-vis notions of discourse and materiality as clearly marked entities and units of analysis (e.g., Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011). By proposing the concept of intra-action, Barad seeks to underline that distinct entities, or agencies, do not precede, but

rather emerge from/through their intra-action, meaning that they only become 'distinct' in relation to their mutual entanglement. In other words, intra-action articulates a co-constitutive perspective, as it is through the intra-action of a phenomenon that the discourse-material characteristics are made determinate in a co-constitutive sense (Hughes *et al.*, 2017). Through the concept of intra-action, and its relational scope, we are therefore offered a viewpoint that takes seriously the multiple forces, or agencies, in the becoming of a phenomenon, since it is only through its relation to other 'things' that anything come to exist. Clearly, then, no form of agency has a privileged status; rather, all forces, human and non-human (verbal and non-verbal) are potential forms of agency.

This concept helps to elucidate the reality that phenomena are never absolute; rather, they are becoming materializations of discursive-material intra-activity enacted in/through practices. This is why the research questions I have asked are less about what, for example, middle management *is* (e.g., a formal position within a hierarchy) and relatedly what effective or less effective middle management *is*. Instead, the concept prompts endeavours to trace the intra-acting forces 'within' particular discursive-material practices, and thus allows for an examination of how the associated agency of an intra-action produces particular effects, that is, materializes in certain ways. This study will use this approach in the form of two materializations of middle management, the first relating to identity entanglements (Article One) and the second relating to certain time- and space-'bound' work practices (Article Two).

Materializations in Barad's theorizing are also framed as agential cuts (2003, 2007) and refer to that which is produced by a specific intra-action and which temporarily determines the properties of a phenomenon – here, middle management. Temporally, this means that these agential cuts do not consist of absolute separations but are a 'move' – one move of cutting together-apart a phenomenon produced by the research (Barad, 2014). This does not mean, however, that an agential cut is concerned with leaving behind the past in anticipation of a particular future. In fact, there is no boundary between here-now and there-then, and thus there is no 'new', but only "...traces of what might yet (have) happen(ed)" (Barad, 2014, p. 168) – that is, there are spacetimematterings, to which I will turn next.

The above-outlined assumptions and conceptualizations concerning discourse-materiality and intra-activity has formed the basis for the overall analytical strategy, which I will describe in more detail in "Section 4.3: Approaching middle management".

Spacetimemattering
The concept of spacetimemattering, allows us to see a 'thicker' moment, when time is 'out of joint' and broken in different directions:

> ...the point is that the past was never simply there to begin with and the future is not simply what will unfold; the 'past' and the 'future' are iteratively reworked and enfolded through the iterative practices of spacetimemattering... Space and time are phenomenal, that is, they are intra-actively produced in the making of phenomena; neither space nor time exist as determinate givens, as universals, outside of phenomena. (Barad, 2014, p. 181)

Such a 'queering' of temporality and spatiality presents a now that is a condensed moment of times and spaces intra-actively produced by the materialized phenomenon. This means that, as part of a phenomenon's becoming, time and space are reworked; thus, they are produced as something specific, which is a process of spacetimemattering with a certain performative effect that has ethical consequences (Juelskjær, 2013).

As with discourse and materiality, this suggests that time and space are not predefined entities – time does not simply flow linearly from beginning to end, and space is not a fixed place that can be entered. Rather, they are analytically 'set' in the process of spacetimemattering, involving a now that contains a multiplicity of potential times and spaces, depending on the agential cut that temporally determines the phenomenon.

Working with spacetimemattering, I get to see the multiplicity of the here-and-now. That is, I get to conceive of multiple spaces and times as co-present and co-producing of phenomena (Juelskjær, 2013). This study has produced an agential cut that shows middle management is of spacetimemattering – not something that merely occurs *in* space and at a certain time, but rather a phenomenon that is also 'haunted' (Barad, 2014) by other times and spaces.

4.3. APPROACHING MIDDLE MANAGEMENT

Building on the theoretical inspirations and conceptualizations within critical branches of management and organization studies, in particular organizational discourse studies and new materialist theorizing, I developed my analytical strategy in order to respond to the research question; namely: *How are middle management positions becoming, discursively and materially, across daily work practices in selected primary and lower secondary schools? With which performative effects on the teacher as a middle manager?* The first supporting question concerns method development, which I will address in the next chapter. The second and third questions address two materializations that the research apparatus has produced. As such, these are agential cuts which elucidate that which comes to exist as middle management in this study.

Taking inspiration from a Baradian theorizing, I apply the concept of intra-activity (Barad, 2003) as an overall analytical strategy. In doing so, I advance a way to explore how the relationship of discourse-materiality performs middle management. Thus, I use intra-activity as an approach to trace the active participation of the relationality of human and non-human forces, discourse-materiality. In effect, I am able to pay close attention to the effects produced, that is, that which materializes – which is of significance.

In doing this, I examine something that in Barad's diffractive methodology is called a pattern of difference (Barad, 2007). Already while I was developing my field methods, this thinking permeated my ideas, as I was attuned to the participation of multiple human and non-human forces when producing data (applied in Article One). This resulted in attention being directed towards the differences that matter (i.e., are significant) in field moments, but also when entering the 'analytical engine room'. This involves developing an analytical sensitivity towards how the intra-activity of discursive-material data – such as emotions, technologies and bodies – condition the phenomenon middle management and thus take part in co-constituting this position. Therefore, the difference produced by intra-activity became an organizing concept for the mode of analysis – as well as the mode of fieldwork.

Figure 1, below, is a visualization of this analytical approach, showing that the intra-activity between the data determine the boundaries and properties of a particular materialization – the difference made – relating, in this study, to middle managers' identity work and organizings of work. Further specifications of the analytical process, steps and stages, will be unfolded in "Chapter 5" Methodology", section 5.4.1: "Doing analysis".
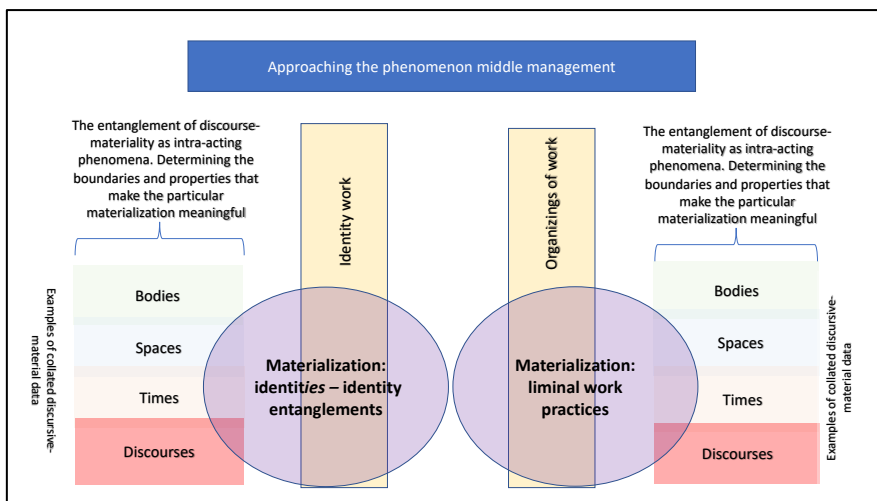
Figure 1: Diagram visualizing the analytical approach

Middle management materializing as (intra-acting) identi*ties* – or identity entanglements – specifically responds to the second supporting question. This concerns the identity construction of middle managers, for which I draw on the concept of identity work (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, and in particular processual and performative perspectives within this scholarship (Ainsworth *et al.*, 2009; Hultin & Introna, 2019; Linstead and Thomas,2002). This part of the analytical strategy is employed in Article Two. Also materializing, and responding to the third supporting question, are particular space- and time-'bound' work practices, or forms of organizing, that develop in/through the everyday work of middle managers. I explore this by using the concept of liminality and its recent appropriation by broad organization studies (Ellis & Ybema, 2010; Johnson & Sørensen, 2015; Söderlund & Borg, 2018; Ybema *et al.* 2011), as well as applying Barad's concept of spacetimemattering – introduced above – as an analytical vehicle to approach the spacetime-configuring of such work practices. This part of the strategy is applied in Article Three.

4.3.1. ANALYZING IDENTITY BECOMINGS OF MIDDLE MANAGERS

The last few decades have produced a surge of literature within broad management and organization studies that is invested in explorations treating identity as an evolving set of constructions (Alvesson *et al.*, 2008, p. 6). This implies a processual conceptualization of the matter, coined as identity work (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). However, the idea of assigning primacy to human agency in this process still prevails in most studies (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt *et al.*, 2006; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Watson, 2008; Webb, 2006). In line with this study's theoretical framework, and thus its conceptualization of middle management positions as emerging from discourse-material intra-activity, I am invested in tracing what Alvesson *et al.* (2008) identify as 'the what' of identity construction processes. This concerns the main ingredients out which identities are constructed. These ideas, proposed as future avenues, suggest that agency is not necessarily 'in the hands of' the human subject, but come to be through the interaction of other elements, or resources, as they call it (Alvesson *et al.*, 2008, p. 19). These include both discursive and material resources; for example, embodied practices, or institutional structures, such as hierarchies or job descriptions, narratives, relationships, discourses etc.

Building on these ideas, I am able to see the identity construction/becoming of middle managers as something other, or more, than an effect of human intentionality. Instead, it is an effect of multiple discursive and material resources. Adding a Baradian form of thinking to this, I extend this focus and further develop it, because it is not the individual resources that have agency and interact; rather, it is the relationality (Barad, 2003; Kuhn *et al.*, 2017) and the way in which the discursive-material resources come together, and produce, or perform, particular identities.

I coin this process 'identity intra-activity' and, by doing so, I draw upon studies that conceptualize identities as always becoming, ongoing (Ainsworth *et al.*, 2009; Harding *et al.*, 2014; Watson, 2008) and flowing continuously through practices that configure the evolving identities (Hultin & Introna, 2019). Such processes are likewise described in related literature on positioning theory and involve specific positioning processes associated with the becomings and emerging struggles of identity construction (Thomas & Davies, 2005).

In the analysis, I adopt an italicized pronunciation from Watson (2008) – identit*ies* – thereby highlighting that, by viewing this process as relational, we get to see the intra-acting discourse-materiality that materializes 'multi-ties', i.e., multiple, simultaneous entanglements of identit*ies* that play out in/through the everyday work of middle managers. This is reflected in the analytical movements by viewing the relationality of discourse-materiality as the constituting dynamics through which identit*ies* are constructed. This occurs in the flow of practices of everyday work during which the middle managers intra-act with different spaces/places, people, 'things', discourses, emotions, times etc. This is why the focus of analysis is on such intra-actions, or 'meetings'. These are not to be mistaken as a meeting that can be isolated to a given time and space, a predefined discourse or an institutional structure, but rather a meeting that cuts across these elements. Analytically, this involves trying to understand what happens when intra-active movements occur. The analysis therefore concerns the situated practices of human and non-human resources taking part in the construction and entanglement of multiple identities.

4.3.2. ANALYZING THE BECOMING OF MIDDLE MANAGEMENT WORK PRACTICES

As the dissertation's literature review displays, renderings of ambiguity and complexity in regard to the everyday lives of middle managers are rather prevalent. These concern, for example, being 'sandwiched' and continuously in-between expectations, relationships, tasks etc. (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020; Sims, 2003), leading to struggles and tensions due to having to face both ways: upwards and downwards. A great deal of the literature relating to this ambiguity concerns the identity work of middle managers. Although still few in number, others are turning to the everyday work of middle managers as implicated in the discussions of ambiguity and complexity (e.g., Ashforth *et al.*, 2000; Balogun, 2003; Iedema *et al.*, 2004), and see these as organizing features emerging from the work practices in-between. This establishes a level of analysis, which I follow, that focuses on the *actual* work practices. That is a redirected focus, away from looking at middle managers as entities sandwiched in-between two layers – in a 'crossfire of pressure' (Gallos, 2002) – towards looking at everyday, situated and emerging doings and practices, a work becoming that is performed within the interstices of an organization. In this way, I develop an approach that views middle management as more than a fixed state.

In analysing the emerging organizing and related ambiguity, I draw on the concept of liminality (Turner, 1967, 1969; Van Gennep, 1901/1960) that is developing from within anthropology, and particularly its appropriation by organization and management studies (Borg & Söderlund, 2015; Ybema *et al.*, 2011). This concept articulates a processual perspective on in-betweenness, since in-between does not only relate to a given and distinct phase, or a given and distinct time and space, but can also be considered a more permanent way of being betwixt and between (Turner, 1967). As such, the liminality helps me to conceptualize the blurred boundaries of middle management work and the related spatial and temporal elements involved in this work. In order to facilitate an analytical sensitivity to time and space, I utilize the concept of spacetimemattering (Barad, 2014). Applying this lens, space, time and matter become performative features intra-acting middle management work – thus a practice that is materialized by non-linear time(s) and non-static space(s). Through this intra-activity, I aim to show how a form of space and time 'boundness' produces certain liminal conditionings of middle-managers' work.

Thus, the analytical movements are bound to spacetimemattering in the sense that I produce a 'thick' moment encompassing multiple times/spaces, which helps to elucidate the blurred boundaries of middle-management work. Concretely, I trace what I call 'spatio-temporal props', or 'spatio-temporalities', which take part in materializing middle management work. These props consist of discursive-material forces, such as bodies, objects feelings and times that, when intra-acting, produce a difference that in turn produces certain spacetimematterings. This means that the intra-acting props 'do' something to their work – the difference (re)configures (Barad, 2003) their work in certain ways. In the analysis, I look for tensions between these spacetimematterings, producing what I coin a 'liminal pull' and materializing certain organizings of work. As such, I study the entangling and becoming effects that differences make.

4.4. SUMMARIZING NOTES

In this chapter, I have aimed to provide an overview of the theoretical inspirations and debates that have informed my study and the development of my overall analytical strategy.

I have outlined the rise of a 'turn to materiality' developing within ODS, including theorizations of CCO. This developing research is preoccupied with the co-constitutive features of the relationship of discourse and materiality and their organizing properties within organizational life. The theoretical perspectives highlight the effects of such relationships, and thus express a clear interest in the underlying constituting dynamics of organizational phenomena.

Some of the literature that is invested in the material turn draws inspiration from the notions of discourse and materiality developing within new materialism. The work of Karen Barad, and her radical framework concerning discursive-material relationality and the performative 'nature' of such relationships, in particular has led to new ways of thinking about organizing and organization. This includes dismissing any ideas of discourse or materiality viewed in entity terms. This means that the constituting 'powers' lie within the relationship between the two; they are ontologically *in*separable elements; discourse is more than a linguistic matter and in order to exist it needs to be materialized in some form or shape, and vice versa materiality is more than a 'thing', it is always and already discursive. By implication, such a perspective focuses attention on the ongoing and dynamic enactments of reality and thus provides a process-sensitive framework.

In an effort to summarize these ideas, and the impact they have had on my research, I have presented the overall analytical strategy; a new-materialist-inspired and process- and context-sensitive approach to the study of emerging middle-management positions. This approach seeks to enable explorations of how discursive matter and material discourse intra-act middle management in/through the everyday work of middle managers. As such, the approach is based on difference as an organizing principle – because intra-action is where difference 'gets made', i.e., certain materializations occur (exist) and thereby become significant.

The approach thus aims to elucidate how materializations are already and always subsumed and governed in/by a range of human and non-human forces, discourse-materiality, that are conditioning of middle management. This has helped me to conceive of the constitutive dynamics of the becoming(s) of middle management as they emerge, and their performative effects. The analytical approach I put forward thus privileges the dynamic, emerging, unstable organizing of middle management.

Clearly, this strategy has implications for the overall research apparatus of this study. This concerns the development of field methods, as briefly mentioned in the previous section, but the strategy also prompts certain ontological and epistemological considerations, including concerns about field engagement and participant interaction in the production of knowledge. I will turn to these in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5. METHODOLOGY

This chapter introduces the methodology related to the research apparatus of this dissertation. Inspired by Barad's diffractive methodology (2007), the notion of research apparatus that I put forward involves a particular researcher practice that is sensitive to and explicates the inseparability of several dimensions involved in the research.

The first part of the chapter details the ontological premise that is actively organizing the research apparatus and thus co-producing of the particular agential cut that this research is. The chapter then goes on to introduce the literature searches and other method developments, as well as presenting reflections concerning the particular research position that this 'set-up' demands. The chapter also describes the process of data management and analysis. In continuation of this, the second part of the chapter includes the dissertation's first article, which concerns a particular researcher practice. This practice requires sensitivity towards multimodality when developing methods to approach the constituting complexities of discourse-materiality relations when engaging with the, often messy and vibrating, life in the field.

5.1. A BECOMING ONTOLOGY

Thinking with new materialism, and particularly the work of Barad (2003, 2007), places certain demands on how to investigate phenomena. Following quantum physicist Niels Bohr, Barad argues that our instruments of investigation are not simply observational tools; rather, they are specific material embodiments that take part in constructing the phenomena we study. A methodology, or research apparatus, resting on these assumptions can never stand apart from the world that is being investigated – the apparatus and the 'object' being studied are inseparable. This means that the world is differently materialized according to the specific conditions (Doyle, 2016). That is, the theories and concepts we bring to the research, our situated researcher bodies and the methods we employ are all materially present and co-producing the phenomenon in question. Thus, in a Baradian universe, ontology and epistemology cannot be separated (Barad, 2007). Echoing this stance, the research apparatus in this dissertation can therefore be described as anti-realist, which is to say that the research does not aim to uncover 'true' knowledge about the social world; instead, my interest is in the constituting dynamics producing phenomena.

By implication, this approach highlights phenomena as always in the process of becoming, precarious and impermanent in 'nature'. Clearly, such a stance is in many ways akin to poststructuralist- or constructionist-informed methodologies. However, my inspirations from new materialism and the 'turn to materiality' extends (does not

reject!) these perspectives, by developing an approach that takes materiality more seriously (Orlikowski & Scott, 2015). As developed in "Chapter 4: Theory", this approach involves viewing materiality as more than mere material 'stuff' added to the mix (Kuhn, 2020, p. 7). In fact, such a perspective reflects an ontology that sees phenomena as constituted by the relationality of discourse-materiality, and thus recognizes a becoming as far more than human discursive acts generating meaning. Instead, the becoming of phenomena depends upon the logic constituting the research practice (De Laet & Mol, 2000 in Kuhn, 2020) in/through where they become ontologically distinct. New-materialist-inspired inquiries therefore concern the becoming of many 'realities'. What this means is that our phenomena are ongoing and always in the making and thus are not pre-defined entities but are defined by the temporary boundaries and properties of the 'components' of the phenomena produced by our apparatus (Barad, 2003, p. 815).

This dissertation thus rests on a form of becoming ontology (Barad, 2003; Kuhn *et al.*, 2017; Orlikowski & Scott, 2015), a type of inquiry that views middle management as a process of becoming(s), materializing in the precarious practices of everyday work.

Such a research apparatus prompts several ethical considerations because a becoming ontology highlights that explorations in the field not only explore phenomena, but also constitute them. This opens up space for discussions about the significance of the new possibilities that we as researchers help breathe life into; that is, the material effects produced by our research. Indeed, this necessitates a particular form of accountability (Barad, 2007) that entails an ethical responsiveness concerning what has been marginalized or who stands to gain. In this study, such responsiveness has, among other things, challenged me not to privilege human intentionality but also to embrace the often marginalized and subtle elements that take part in constituting the phenomenon in question. This means, for example, including multimodalities such as, emotions, books, spaces, documents, times and the unsaid as participating forces, as well as formal organizing, when studying becoming in the middle.

5.2. LITERATURE REVIEW AS A RESEARCH METHOD

This section provides the foundation for advancing the knowledge produced in this dissertation by presenting the literature review as a research method that builds on and relates relevant, extant research to the current study. The review is constructed as a semi-systematic review (Snyder, 2019) and is the result of a systematic literature search that was subject to a process of identifying materials for potential inclusion or exclusion. Thus, the review reveals demarcations of discursive-material intra-actions of middle management and their performative effects on the field.

The literature search is based on a conventional subject search method (Papaioannou *et al.*, 2009) combined with three supplementary strategies: reference list checking, citation search and contact with experts (Papaioannou *et al.*, pp. 116–117). The subject searches were carried out on two host databases (Proquest and EbscoHost) with the aim of encompassing different disciplines in one search (e.g., education, management, social science etc.). The searches were restricted to English-language publications, but not to a particular time period. In addition, the selected literature was all based on a peer-review process, implying that the included material holds some degree of permanence (Grant & Booth, 2009, p. 97).

The supplementary strategy of reference list checking was applied to all the included articles, and new articles were included if not already a part of the subject search results. The citation search was performed in order to identify relevant research and research communities connected to key scholars within the field of middle management. As with the reference list checking, any new articles that had not already been identified during the subject search were included. The database used for the citation search was Google Scholar. Throughout the PhD process, contact with experts has been in the form of oral or written dialogue stemming from conference participation, PhD courses and supervision. The experts have been from within the fields of management and organization, organizational communication and education and have helped to identify key literature. In the following, I will further describe the movements and considerations relating to the literature search outlined above.

I commenced my review of the literature on middle management during the very first months of my PhD, as I started exploring management studies in a rather broad manner in order to orient myself within this vast field associated with managing organizations. This included familiarizing myself with the historical developments and main discussions, which was important because these developments and discussions influence and entangle with extant understandings of middle management. With a master's degree in the social sciences and majoring in organizational learning, I was familiar with management studies through organizational theory, which rendered my journey into the field of management and managing a fairly familiar path. My research was initially informed by diving more deeply into the management literature and mapping out the field with regards to functional, or mainstream, versus more critical approaches to management. This was relevant because my research is situated among critical and discursive perspectives on middle management and its organization. Against this background, I started 'looking for' the middle manager in this literature, both theorizations of middle management and empirical research. Initially, I performed broad subject searches on middle management and review literature, followed by narrower searches that focused closer to the research interest in my study. This involved subject searches regarding research on identity work and work practices. Moreover, I also searched for social constructionist perspectives on middle management; for example, studies concerned

with discursive aspects of middle managing. This was due to my interest in the constitutive dynamics and the performative effects of middle management.

Subsequently, I performed reference-list checking and citation searches on the identified material, and I organized this research in terms their subfield correlation (strategic management, identity, organizational learning etc.), methods (quantitative, qualitative, mixed-method, number of participants etc.), empirical context (school, construction, health, engineering etc.), primary finding/purpose (e.g. study shows how middle managers construct their identities; how they are sandwiched, or an indispensable layer of fluff produces hierarchies etc.), theorization (sensemaking, labour process theory, discourse etc.) and ways of conceptualizing middle management (e.g. middle managers are linking pins, liaisons, boundary-spanners etc.)[5].

This process generated an insight into the various theorizations, including their ontological and epistemological underpinnings, as well as an awareness of the extent of the existing empirical research. Accordingly, this organization of the material provided an overview of the different conceptualizations of middle management and approaches to the study of the subject, as well as an overview of how the concept has developed over time and across fields. This formed the basis for the particular reading and agential cut that I present here; that is, the narrative of the hierarchy story, or 'origin' story. Also, this led me to organize the identified literature into three strands of research demarcating different responses to the hierarchy story in early research: prescriptive perspectives, descriptive perspectives and interpretative perspectives. This organizing also informed the positioning of the present study and the contributions it makes.

5.3. ETHNOGRAPHIC INSPIRED FIELDWORK

This dissertation has been conducted as an ethnographic inspired fieldwork carried out during the autumn of 2018 and at the beginning of 2019, lasting a total of five months. In this section, I will give a brief introduction to ethnography as a particular approach to the investigation of organizational life, which has informed this study's development of methods and my engagements with the field. The section also includes a discussion of the ethical considerations relating to performing ethnographic work.

Ethnography was initially a research tradition devoted to the study of communities and cultures outside the West (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Van Maanen, 1988; Ybema *et al*., 2009a). However, one more recent strand targets organizational

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[5] Information relating to the different organizing themes was added when available. That is, if it was clearly stated in the literature.

communities as a context for studying the humdrum details of the "...lived experience of organizing and being organized by others..." (Fineman *et al*., 2005, p. ix). The approach taken by an organizational ethnography (Buchanan & Dawson, 2007; Cunliffe, 2010; Kostera, 2007; Neyland, 2007; Ybema *et al.*, 2009a;) thus foregrounds the lived, everyday complexity of work, with an emphasis on the mundane exchanges between organizational members during 'just another day at the office'. In this study, I specifically situate my work within this strand of research, and the organizational context that this demands. The ethnographic approach that I put forward therefore echoes the purpose of such endeavours, articulated by Van Maanen (1979, p. 540) as: "to uncover and explicate the ways in which people in particular work settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situation." However, to *un*cover does not involve having to *dis*cover deeper, as-yet uncovered layers of 'truth' – there is no *within* needing to be uncovered, as some of the older forms of ethnographic work imply (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 10). Rather, the research interest within this study (alongside those of many recent poststructuralist- and constructionist-oriented organizational ethnographies) lies in exploring how realities that might appear real to organizational members come to be constructed and negotiated over time (Cunliffe, 2010; May & Mumby, 2005). This entails paying attention to and tracing the situated interactions between organizational members, artifacts, stories and the symbolic. As I elaborate further below, such efforts involve attuning to multimodality (Iedema, 2007).

Through detailed accounts, or 'thick' descriptions (Geertz, 1973), organizational ethnography contributes to a grounded, and practice-based understanding of organizational life (Ybema *et al.*, 2009a, p. 2). Like more traditional strands of ethnography, organizational ethnographers often employ a variety of methods when studying phenomena. This is not to zoom in on a more truthful picture through multiple methods; rather, it is to create richer and more nuanced descriptions (Denzin, 1994), consisting of data that is sensitive to the situated, complex processes concerning the organization of work and how that organizing organizes people. In the words of Cunliffe (2010, p. 231), this entails producing:

> ...thick descriptions ... about micro interactions in the field, captured through a blend of methods including field notes, recordings of talk and meetings, visual recordings of interactions and gestures, attending meetings, participant verbal or written accounts, shadowing (Czarniawska, 2007), ethnographic interviews (unstructured, semistructured, exploratory), emails, and so on.

Consequently, such work demands forms of fieldwork that take place at the scene. That is, it requires the researcher to spend time 'hanging out' – hence, it is a form of engagement and empirical presence that extends beyond a quick dip into the field in order for the researcher to explore and understand the continual constructions and negotiations of organizing. This does not, however, require a researcher position of

going native (Hastrup, 1995) or the associated implications, such as spending a year or more at a site in order to be able to describe distinct ways of life. Rather, and with respect to the current research with its field duration of approximately five months, this involves seeking as much context as can reasonably be obtained (Couldry, 2003, p. 53). Hence, this research denotes what could be called a passing ethnography (Couldry, 2003) in the study of middle-management positions. This furthermore implies, a 'stretched' notion of context, which Couldry touches upon in his theory of passing ethnography, but it is also a perspective that has been developed within multi-sited ethnography (Falzon, 2016; Marcus, 1995). What is stressed from this perspective is that the complex (organizational) lives/phenomena of today stretch across many sites and contexts and therefore cannot be accounted for by focusing on a single site or context. The research implication of this stance is that the study of phenomena involves exploring emerging, situated particularities across a spatially dispersed field (Falzon, 2016, p. 2). The aim here is not to compare across sites, but to create empirical richness and complexity-sensitive data. Taking inspiration from these ideas of multi-sited phenomena, my fieldwork was not designed as an ethnography of one site, seeking an entity to uncover; rather, it is a fieldwork project organized around the study of middle management positions as a multi-sited and complex phenomenon emerging across sites, as well as across actors, times and practices.

Insisting upon a detailed exploration of middle management positions and having ambitions to produce thick descriptions thereof, despite the passing 'nature' of my fieldwork, I developed ethnographic methods through the theorizing provided by organizational discourse studies and recent new materialist influences (Barad, 2003; Iedema, 2007; Kuhn *et al.*, 2017). This means that the thick descriptions involve accounts of the field that extend beyond language-use and a focus on, for example, conversation or rhetoric (mono-modality). Instead, the thickness here entails a multimodal (Iedema, 2007) focus that "...pushes the data gathering and analysis to be sensitive to the symbolic, material, and/or the institutional..." (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010, p. 197). This implies tracing multimodalities that are both subtle and tangible, such as tensions in a room, what is said, what is not said, body positionings, technologies and more.

Little has been written about the development of methods and modes of data within critical perspectives on organization and management, including organizational discourse studies. Article One in this dissertation: "Retooling methods for approaching discourse-materiality relations: A new materialist framework of multimodal sensitivity" (Dille & Plotnikof, 2020), contributes by suggesting a framework that draws inspiration from ethnographic methods, enabling a retooling of existing methods to fieldwork in order to take into account multiple modes of data, or multimodality. The article argues that method innovations within this field are underexplored and that developing multimodal sensitivity (and data) will help us

produce 'thick' data and thereby conceive of the constitutive dynamics of everyday organizational life and the phenomena we study.

The following sections (Section 5.3.1–5.4.1) will describe the basic methodological implications and concerns of the overall research apparatus, upon which Article One builds.

5.3.1. CONSIDERATIONS OF A RESEARCHER POSITION

Before completing my master's degree in social sciences, I had a career within education. Hence, my everyday working life was situated in a school context that for my part consisted of teaching, developing curriculum plans, engaging in collaborations with other teachers around students or particular classes etc. In addition to this, and alongside my teaching practices, I had a supporting function as head of literacy development at the school where I was working; thus, a position that was similar in many respects to the positions of the middle managers whom I am studying here. This affiliation has obviously led to me having some intimate knowledge of the field I am entering, but it has also produced some struggles regarding how to defamiliarize myself and be able to see: 'what's going on? – what's the mystery?', as well as worries about reproducing problematics that I myself have encountered and related feelings of loyalty to and alliance with the middle managers.

In the following, I develop the above considerations by drawing upon insights into doing ethnographic work, and particularly insights concerning 'insider-ness' (Alvesson, 2009; Neyland, 2007) and feelings of alliance (Nickelsen, 2009) from which I found inspiration when planning my fieldwork and developing my methods.

In some ways, the fieldwork I conducted draws on some of the logics of an at-home ethnography (Alvesson, 2009) in the sense that I as a researcher describe a cultural setting to which I have 'natural access'. This does not imply that I am an active participant in the field on a daily basis, but it does point to a research position other than that of a professional stranger (Agar, 1986). The latter implies a form of detached researcher position, distanced from the field and its participants (Haraway, 1991, p.183).

Clearly, my particular situatedness influenced the ways in which I positioned my researcher body, and become positioned, when in the field, as well as how I gained access (I return to this latter point in the next section). This stance affects several dimensions of research practice. Initially, it highlights Haraway's influential claim (1991) that partiality is the true condition for any research to be treated seriously. Thus, knowledge is always situated, meaning that a researcher must acknowledge that her/his engagements in the field stem from a position of somewhere in particular (Haraway, 1991, p. 1996). Such a claim implies that the research apparatus includes the situated researcher body, as mentioned in the previous section (and according to

Barad (2003), all the other involved elements: methods, participants, 'things', feelings, discourses, politics, cultures etc.), which furthermore manifest certain possibilities and constraints when doing fieldwork.

Concretely, this involved 'openings', particularly in terms of field access, but also openings in terms of quickly decoding the logic of the organization 'school' and my ability, for example, to express myself in nuanced or precise ways using a certain 'native' vocabulary. Or, by knowing how to position my body in the teacher's lounge or when shadowing the middle managers as they interacted with students, due to my embodied personal experience with student interactions and teachers' lounges. This made my experience and the related awkwardness and emotional strain that often occur when conducting fieldwork (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 89) seem less of a struggle.

However, my situatedness also created some constraints, in the sense that it sometimes served to 'close things off' in the sense that there were certain aspects of this position that were simply too familiar to me. I was thus preoccupied with 'mystifying' the field and, as stressed by Van Maanen (1995, p. 20); "...making the familiar strange..."

In doing this, I developed several strategies. One of these involved an ongoing exploratory ambition, for example, when asking questions during interviews and informal conversations, that was oriented towards having them elaborate or explain certain words, events or structures that I was already familiar with from personal experience. This was an attempt to make the familiar strange, by asking questions as though I knew very little (Lofland, 1971, in Neyland, 2007, p. 101) and thus deconstructing taken-for-granted understandings and practices of middle management.

Another strategy involved becoming attuning to chaotic feelings, such as frustration, annoyance or particular feelings of excitement. I used these registrations as signs that something was 'going on' – something puzzling, or a wonderment that would produce a form of reflexive distance (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 106), acting as a critical companion and an aid to holding onto the mystery. As one example: a mystery materialized when interviewing one of the middle managers and experiencing a feeling of sadness and injustice as she expressed some of the social implications of being a middle manager, in terms of her relationships with teacher-colleagues. This prompted me to wonder why a specific focus on the relationships of middle managers does not seem to be a current concern at these schools. This was a concern that, prior to this interaction, I had not been alert to, because I had personal experiences of simply handling such implications myself.

These considerations of my researcher position, my *somewhere in particular*, also provoked ethical reflections in terms of feelings of alliance with the middle managers, as the latter example concerning the social implications of being a middle manager

also implies. It is not uncommon to form a bond with participants while conducting ethnographic fieldwork, therefore this is a phenomenon that is described in the literature (e.g., Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, pp. 86ff.). However, I was particularly inspired by Nickelsen's (2009) engaged scholarship and his reflections upon alliances in the field and the potential ethical implications of these. This facilitated an awareness of how my personal experiences of enacting a similar position might produce a feeling of alliance with the middle managers and the everyday complexities of their work. Therefore, I attempted to be attentive to the subtle aspects of my interference and of feelings of alliance in order not to cause too much disturbance by, for example, making issues of middle management more problematic than already experienced. This involved paying careful attention to how I asked questions or responded to questions from the middle managers. It also involved being aware of other, even more subtle, signs of aspects such as approval or disapproval of a certain situation or utterance.

In line with Nickelsen (2009), and circling back to Haraway (1991), this is not to say that forms of normativity should ideally vanish. In fact, as I have tried to explain in this section, partiality is inherently 'there' and should be transparent. Rather, I am attempting to acknowledge and take into consideration the potential effects of fieldwork – despite one's lack of control over "...the effect of one's interference unilaterally" (Nickelsen, 2009, p. 14).

5.3.2. FIELD SITES AND FIELD ACCESS

Field sites
As outlined in Chapter Two, this research is a case study (Yin, 1989), based on a collaboration with two public schools in a municipality close to Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark. The municipality was chosen using selection criterion based on its experience and developments relating to having teachers in middle-management positions in charge of co-leading on certain organizational agendas and improving overall school efficiency. This had involved formulating specific and concrete local policies to enhance middle-management positions in schools. The two schools were selected based on criteria stipulating that they had to have formally appointed middle managers in those specific positions and an established practice at the schools of middle managers co-leading colleagues towards an improved school.

The participants involved were actors with direct connections to the particular research focus concerning middle management positions. Of course, this involved middle managers, but also other actors who took part in conditioning their everyday work. this included representatives of school management because they had the overall responsibility for appointing the middle managers as well as facilitating their practice within the organization, for example by making the purpose and function of the middle managers explicit to the teaching staff. Furthermore, selected colleagues of the middle managers who were presently collaborating with them, and/or had

previously done so, participated. Corresponding with the understanding of middle management in processual terms, as a becoming, the focus and purpose of involving participants other than middle managers were to explore the continual interactions and negotiations constitutive of middle management. This involves the human actors who participate in their work either by being the 'recipients' of middle management efforts or by providing the overfall frames of action for middle managers' work.

The participating middle managers were selected by the management at the two schools, but they were all given the option of rejecting the invitation. The participating teacher-colleagues were selected by the middle managers, and likewise they had the option of choosing not to participate.

Clearly, there were other actors who participated in more peripheral ways, e.g., while I conducted an observation at an all-staff meeting, but included in the summarization below are the participants who had been explicitly invited to contribute to the investigation of middle-management positions in the respective schools.

In field context one, the village school, the participants consisted of two middle managers, two representatives of school management and six teachers. At the 'city' school, the participants were three middle managers, two representatives of school management and eight teachers.

Field access
With a background in education, and hence an insight into and awareness of the everyday 'grind', the structure of a school year, recurring pedagogical discussions, social dynamics etc., and not least the ability to utilize a context-sensitive vocabulary[6], I felt optimistic that this 'insider-ness' would create advantageous conditions as I sought to establish partnerships with the schools.

This feeling was supported early on during my informal conversations with professionals from the field (teachers and school managers), when I sensed an immediate interest and relevance in regard to the topic of my study, and furthermore a basic demand for the knowledge that I was aiming to produce. These informal conversations also provided me with the hope that partnerships and thus field access would be possible because there seemed to an empirical and experienced 'need' – and therefore a potential organizational value for which I could argue when attempting to gain entry.

Despite these perceived favourable circumstances for entry, a gatekeeper within the field of education established the initial point of contact. This person was recruited

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[6] By context-sensitive vocabulary, I am referring to the ability of an insider to use the appropriate and pertinent language, e.g., certain conventional discourses that in this context are articulated when talking about students, learning, education etc.

from my personal network and, although recently retired, had been a well-known and respected school principal within the municipality concerned for two decades. She acted as a form of preliminary gatekeeper aiming to 'get the attention' of school management members at several of the local schools and thus potentially speeding up the process of negotiating access. This meant that, prior to my more formal contact with schools, she would send off a short and informal email concerning the current research and asking whether they would be interested in me contacting them to discuss a potential collaboration. Although crucial for establishing the initial contact, this gatekeeper was only one of multiple future gatekeepers whom I encountered throughout the fieldwork. This highlights the reality that access negotiations are a continuous process and often a field study premise (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Later gatekeepers included, for example, school management when facilitating access to relevant observational settings etc.

The informal strategy described above generated very prompt replies from the field, perhaps impelled by feelings of goodwill towards my gatekeeper, which allowed me to quickly engage in a dialogue with school principals at four out of five of the schools contacted. In this sense, activating my gatekeeper's situatedness proved effective, but indirectly it also served as a form of selection tool because she only reached out to principals of schools whom she had a feeling would be open to 'being studied' and had the time to engage in a rather time-consuming collaboration[7]. This initial dialogue with schools resulted in agreements for collaborations being made with the two schools. These agreements were based on the fact that the two schools had concrete experience of having teachers in middle-management positions in connection to particular school programmes, as well as the timing of the fieldwork being convenient for them.

5.3.3. METHODS OF GENERATING QUALITATIVE DATA

Doing ethnographic inspired fieldwork requires generating different types of data, in order to produce 'thick' descriptions of the often messy and disordered nature of life lived in the field (Cunliffe, 2009). In this study, four kinds of methods provided these data: shadowing, individual and focus-group interviews (including informal conversations), participant log writings and vignette writings (see Table 1, below).

Although the primary focus of the fieldwork was on tracing multimodalities and thus attuning to how middle management positions were emerging, both discursively and materially, across *daily* work practices, the intensity and participation in participants'

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[7] This meant, for example, that she did not reach out to schools that had just undergone a change process or were experiencing a period of instability that would have created a lack of 'mental' and time resources.

daily lives throughout the five-month fieldwork period varied depending on how busy their schedules were, and the overall school-year programme. Having great respect for the bustling and sometimes hectic working life of professionals within education, I made sure to adapt to their schedules and plans in terms of what was possible in order to create as little disturbance and extra workload as possible for the participating staff (middle managers, school management and teacher-colleagues). As a consequence, some weeks consisted merely of log-interactions, meaning that my 'presence' and insight into their daily work practices came in the form of their weekly log writings, which they would send to me via email.

Contexts of shadowing and data sources
When shadowing, I would participate in as many formal and informal settings related to participants' practice as middle managers as possible. This entailed shadowing the middle managers in formal meetings with school management where they would discuss future initiatives, interventions or issues relating to these tasks. It also involved shadowing the middle managers when they were formally enacting their position, such as in meetings with colleagues to plan or evaluate interventions or observation sessions that the middle managers had been, or would be, a part of. Shadowing would also take place while they were conducting observations of colleagues' teaching practices and at all-staff meetings, where the middle managers might be in charge of presenting a particular topic to the whole staff, among other tasks. Shadowing the middle managers in these formal settings revealed concrete, lived enactments of a middle management position and constructions thereof, emerging in/through interactions and negotiations with colleagues, school management and their surroundings (including other social and material elements) in the shape of 'delimited, formal space.

From the very first encounter with the middle managers at the two case schools, it quickly became clear that the position of middle manager was in many ways entangled with that of being a teacher. I therefore opted to also shadow the middle managers in transitions 'around' the formal settings described above. This included moving between meetings where they would enact as middle managers, or between meetings and class teaching, while on breaks in the teachers' lounge or outside on student-watch duty etc. In particular, these latter, informal, settings generated insights into some of the fluid, subtle and intertwined teacher/middle manager practices, and issues concerning their relationships with colleagues.

Data sources when shadowing consisted of handwritten field notes and electronic notes, including my own reflection notes, small handwritten mappings of multimodalities, photos of objects such as a whiteboard showing process plans drawn up by middle managers or school management, meeting agendas and documents describing school initiatives, process plans etc.

The data sources relating to the interviews (individual and focus groups) were audio recordings, photos brought by participants, vignette writings brought by the researcher, participant-produced 'mock-up' meeting agendas and post-its containing reflections and notes.

The log writings consisted of participant/researcher co-authored themes, participant writings, photos taken by the participants and other images, such as digital drawings taken from the internet.

The vignette writings comprised of data sources taken from the total data set, including field notes, photos, mappings and audio recordings.

Table 1, below, presents an overview of the total data set:

Date	Activity	Data	Participants
Sep. 2018	**5 informal Conversations** (unstructured/exploratory)	Fieldnotes	Middle managers
	2 informal conversations (unstructured/exploratory)	Fieldnotes, org. charts	School management
	2 shadowings: coordinating/task meeting	Fieldnotes, formal job description,	Middle managers, school management
	2 shadowings: planning and feedback session	Fieldnotes, process plan, textbook materials, student evaluation forms	Middle manager, teacher colleagues
	11 shadowings: 'tagging along' to/from meetings; in teachers' lounge; on breaks	Fieldnotes	Middle managers, colleagues
	19 participant log writings	Participant writings, photos	Middle managers

Date	Activity	Data	Participants
Oct. 2018	**5 informal conversations** (unstructured/exploratory)	Fieldnotes	Middle managers
	2 informal conversations (unstructured/exploratory)	Fieldnotes	Middle managers, teacher colleagues
	1 shadowing: All-staff meeting	Fieldnotes, meeting agenda	Middle managers, school management, teacher colleagues
	1 shadowing: middle manager's observation of colleague's classroom teaching	Fieldnotes	Middle manager, teacher colleague
	3 shadowings: planning and feedback session	Fieldnotes	Middle managers, teacher colleagues
	1 shadowing: workshop with external consultancy	Fieldnotes, photos of supervision strategies	Middle managers, school management, external consultant
	1 shadowing: coordinating/task meeting	Fieldnotes	Middle managers, school management
	2 shadowings: school development workshops	Fieldnotes, documents about new school initiatives	Middle managers, school management

Date	Activity	Data	Participants
	1 shadowing: session on developing new strategies	Fieldnotes, photos of drawn-up process plan	Middle managers
	15 shadowings: 'tagging along' to/from meetings; in teachers' lounge; on breaks	Fieldnotes	Middle managers, colleagues
	12 participant log writings	Participant writings, photos	Middle managers
Date	**Activity**	**Data**	**Participants**
Nov. 2018	**1 shadowing**: coordinating/task meeting	Fieldnotes	Middle managers, school management
	1 shadowing: All-staff meeting	Fieldnotes, participant-produced instructional video, meeting agenda	Middle managers, school management, teacher colleagues
	8 shadowings: 'tagging along' to/from meetings; in teachers' lounge; on breaks	Fieldnotes	Middle managers, colleagues,
	4 individual interviews: (semi-structured, exploratory)	Audio recording, photos, vignette	Middle managers
	1 focus group: (semi-structured, exploratory)	Audio recording, vignette, group-exercise outputs: e.g., post-its, prioritized meeting agenda	Middle managers, school management
	1 focus group: (semi-structured, exploratory)	Audio recording, photos, group-exercise outputs: e.g., post-its,	Middle managers

		prioritized meeting agenda	
	5 vignettes: used in four individual interviews and one focus group	Written up on the basis of entire data set	
	16 participant log writings	Participant writings, photos	Middle managers
Date	**Activity**	**Data**	**Participants**
Dec. 2018	**1 shadowing:** planning and feedback session	Fieldnotes	Middle managers, teacher colleagues
	1 shadowing: coordinating/task meeting	Fieldnotes	Middle managers, school management
	1 shadowing: session on developing new strategies	Fieldnotes, photos of drawn-up process plan	Middle managers
	5 shadowings: 'tagging along' to/from meetings; in teachers' lounge; on breaks	Fieldnotes	Middle managers, colleagues,
	1 individual interview: (semi-structured, exploratory)	Audio recording, photos, vignette	Middle manager
	1 focus group: (semi-structured, exploratory)	Audio recording, photos, group-exercise outputs: e.g., post-its, prioritized meeting agenda	Middle managers

Date	Activity	Data	Participants
	1 focus group: (semi-structured, exploratory)	Audio recording, vignette, group-exercise outputs: e.g., post-its, prioritized meeting agenda	Middle managers, school management
	1 informal conversations: (unstructured/exploratory)	Fieldnotes	Middle managers
	2 vignettes: used in one individual interview and one focus group	Written up on the basis of entire data set	
	2 participant log writings	Participant writings, photos	Middle managers
Date	**Activity**	**Data**	**Participants**
Jan.–Mar., 2019	**4 shadowings:** 'tagging along' to/from meetings; in teachers' lounge; on breaks	Fieldnotes	Middle managers, colleagues,
	2 individual interviews: (semi-structured, exploratory)	Audio recording	Vice principals
	2 focus groups: (semi-structured, exploratory)	Audio recording, group-exercise outputs: e.g., post-its, prioritized meeting agenda	Middle managers, teacher colleagues
Total data set	**37 days** (3–6 hours each) of fieldwork inspired by ethnography, entailing: - 19 shadowings in formal contexts - 43 shadowings of tagging along; everyday work activities, breaks, preparation etc. - 13 interviews (individual/focus group) - 15 informal conversations - 49 log writings - 7 vignette writings		

Table 1 Overview of methods and data

The (first part of the) research question of this dissertation is: "*How are middle management positions becoming, discursively and materially, across daily work practices in selected primary and lower secondary schools?*" This points to becoming as a central phenomenon. Studying becoming implies an ontology that foregrounds the multiple agentic forces that constitute, in this case, middle-management work. Hence, the methods applied in this fieldwork were developed to be responsive to the becoming complexity of everyday work life, including the vibrancy of multiple modes of meaning, and multimodalities other than linguistics (Iedema, 2007; Plotnikof & Zandee, 2016). Thus, in this research, generating data involves attuning to the connections, or entanglements, between multimodalities that come to matter during the field moments, and therefore it requires a retooling of methods to make them sensitive to exactly this. Thus, the methods applied in this research have been developed to be responsive to multimodality and thus to generating of multimodal data. For example, by including the mapping of multimodalities while tagging along or shadowing, or by introducing vignette writings during interviews, or when enabling co-authorship and photos in the log writings.

The following sections provide overall introductions to the specific methods, including basic structures and other inspirations. As previously mentioned, in Article One I elaborate further on retooling methods and multimodal sensitivity.

Shadowing
Variations of participant observation are commonly used in qualitative research, and in particular in ethnographic inspired studies as a way to explore the everyday lived life and meaning-making of organizational actors – how they act, interact and make sense of their surroundings (Cunliffe, 2010).

Shadowing (Czarniawska, 2007) is a variation of participant observation and is characterized by Czarniawska, whose efforts have been key in developing this method, as a particular mobile form of observation useful in the study of "...people who move often and quickly from place to place" (Czarniawska, 2007, p. 17).

As previously stated, in this study I shadowed five middle managers during their everyday working life over a period of five months. Since the work of these middle managers was closely intertwined with the work of being a teacher, and often unfolded in informal ways, shadowing was utilized in order to access the sometimes-blurred boundaries of middle management, including informal constructions thereof. This involved, for example, shadowing the middle managers as they transitioned from one context entailing enactments as a teacher to another context and enactments as a middle manager – a transition that occurred several times a day.

Moreover, shadowing allowed insights into the subtle micro-transitions that occurred during conversations. These transitions were not 'bound' to a particular physical context like a classroom or a meeting room, but instead appeared during the flow of

conversation and everyday practices while on breaks, or preparing for their next lessons etc. This, also made space for sensitivity towards tracing 'things', or multimodalities (Iedema, 2007), other than the human subject, that take part in conditioning their work, thus corresponding with the theorizing put forward in this dissertation (Barad, 2003; Iedema, 2007; Kuhn *et al.*, 2017). This involves, for example, mapping the great mesh of affective matters of work, things that are left unsaid or particular objects that organize their work practices, such as iPads, posters, books etc.

When entering the two field sites, I was initially introduced to the staff via an email sent round by school management. This was agreed upon so that I could enter the teaching lounge and 'roam' the hallways without the staff feeling insecure about who I was. Initially, though, at both sites I was clearly an outsider and received a lot of puzzled looks and offers to help me find someone when entering the teaching lounge. However, after a couple of weeks of having displayed a relationship with the selected middle managers and the arrival of the email, I was able to come and go quickly without making too much of an 'entrance'.

When shadowing, I would typically take notes on the spot, or immediately afterwards. Depending on the context, I either used a computer or a paper notebook. The latter form of notetaking drew less attention to me and although it was less 'effective' in terms of quantity, I would typically opt to make handwritten notes in contexts where I assessed that tapping on a computer keyboard would create a constant interruption.

Hence, the shadowing activities were structured around formal contexts, such as while the middle managers were conducting observations of colleagues' teaching practices, or in formal meetings for giving feedback to the particular teachers. Shadowing also involved attending meetings between school management and the middle managers or all-staff meetings, where the middle managers would have a distinct role to play, a presentation to give, etc.

In addition, shadowing was also structured around informal contexts, i.e., during breaks when chatting with colleagues or when on student-watch duty, supervising children during recess. Or while on their way to a new commitment, whether it be teaching a class, conducting an observation or facilitating a meeting. These informal contexts typically allowed for more interaction between the middle managers and myself, as they would sometimes brief me on what was to come or nuance or comment on an event that had just taken place and of which I had been a part. These interactions in informal contexts enhanced the building of our relationship, but would also often alert me to other relevant times/places for me to shadow, since during these conversations the middle managers would sometimes casually mention upcoming events, meetings or talks that they had not initially considered to be of interest to me. As a result, the shadowing contexts, both formal and informal, developed and increased with time spent in the field.

The informal context in particular became more frequent, as well as less 'strenuous' for me to participate in throughout the latter part of the fieldwork, as a greater alliance grew between the middle managers and myself (Nickelsen, 2009). This created an ease around details such as where to put my body or what to chat about. As described in "Section 5.3.1: Considerations of a researcher position", this clearly also prompted some ethical concerns, such as how I might influence the middle managers to a greater extent as this alliance grew. This led me to be very alert to whether my comments or questions that I asked, especially in informal contexts, could be perceived as critical of school management or particular structures and ways of organizing in that particular school, or whether certain framings of their position might lead to problematizations that they themselves had not previously found to be problematic.

Participant log writings

Informed by participatory engagements (Czarniawska, 2007; Latham, 2003) and an active framework (Gubrium& Holstein, 1997), I introduced log writings as an additional technique to assist in addressing issues of absence, simultaneity and invisibility, but also as a technique to pick up the day-to-day minutiae of practices and reflections thereon (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 106).

On the topic of absence, the log was intended to provide a continuous insight into the everyday professional lives of the middle managers, and thus to fill in the gaps when I was not there to shadow, but also as a technique to capture the more informal aspects of the position, hence the issue of invisibility. The issue of invisibility therefore refers to early assumptions that the position of middle manager also consists to a large degree of more informal practices playing out in informal settings, such as during lunch breaks, between classes etc. Although, on several occasions, I would continue to shadow the middle managers into more informal and unmanaged spaces (Gabriel, 1995) where they were 'just' colleagues, but were still sometimes approached as middle managers, the insights I gained into the aspect of informality by shadowing were often rather incidental.

On the issues of simultaneity, the log provided the opportunity for insight into more than one middle manager's practice since I was able via their individual writings to get everyday accounts from multiple perspectives, even though in practical terms I was only able to shadow them one at a time.

In the literature, log studies as a field technique are primarily considered to be part of diary studies (Czarniawska, 2007, p. 59) which, according to Czarniawska, has at least two different meanings and uses. One refers to the daily recording of events (a log of activities) and the other to a more narrative and personal reporting. Both activities have a long tradition within ethnographic work and the two are naturally often overlapping and the distinctions between them blurred.

Within this dissertation, I chose to combine the two approaches as I invited the middle managers to record daily events[8], but also to use their logs as a kind of reportage of the week (Latham, 2003, p. 2002) to reflect upon events and other, self-chosen and 'practice-near' themes. I will return to the matter of self-chosen themes below.

Essential to the current research interest and thus a focus when asking the middle managers to produce the log data, were the daily and sometimes trivial everyday practices that, within an active framework, are considered to be a distinct 'entryway' to gain a sense of how the social world is created (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997, p. 7). In this respect, the practice sought to highlight the process and context-focus of the dissertation and contribute with insights into the emergence and enactments of their positions over time (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2005), but it also created a narrative element enabling the middle managers to connect to existing narrative resources (Latham, 2003, p. 2002). These narratives provided the teacher leaders with a clear voice in the organizational ethnography and generated a detailed backdrop for the observational work (Neyland, 2007, p. 122).

In this sense, the log became a living document manifesting itself in the interplay between participant narratives, everyday events and research interests. It developed throughout the research process through a continuous flow of negotiations in the form of meaning-checking pit stops between the middle managers and myself, as we discussed questions such as: "does this make sense?" or "why is this log activity so challenging?" Consequently, and taking inspiration from Latham (2003), the log therefore took on the character of a kind of performance, illuminating a moment-ness and situated-ness of the research process itself as it was being constructed along with the process of that which was being studied (Latham, 2003, p. 2007).

Basic structure: Participant log writings
A central issue when developing the log was getting it recognized and accepted by the participants as a tool for generating insight 'on the fly'. It was therefore crucial that it became 'their' tool of insight and not just mine. A fundamental element in developing this log was thus positioning the middle managers as co-constructors of the content, which meant that they each articulated themes they found important and interesting to reflect upon throughout our collaboration. These themes naturally related to their practice as a middle manager but were not restricted by me to any particular area concerning this position. The goal was for them to identify their own areas of pertinence and to elaborate on these areas as they developed and consolidated over time.

These areas of pertinence were identified by the middle managers at our initial meeting when I introduced them to the reflection log. The identification evolved as a

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[8] Quite concretely, I invited them to note down what they did, how they did it, with whom and where the activity took place.

dialogue between the middle managers and myself, and centred on the question: "what in relation to your practice as a teacher leader seems most important or pertinent for you right now?" Each participating middle manager articulated a theme explaining why this was relevant to her/him, and the others either consented or 'rejected' the theme as relevant to them as well.

As a consequence of these individualized areas of pertinence, some of the data produced by the different participants naturally revolved around varying themes – being 'their own' themes – with relevance to them. This was exactly the point, and hence overrode conventional methodological worries about the 'comparability' of the material produced (Czarniawska, 2007, p. 70).

After encountering Latham's research (2003) and his preoccupation with engaging participants as co-constructors of knowledge by having them write diaries and take an accompanying set of diary photographs, I was inspired to include another modality in addition to written text. This was an attempt to invoke a different type of narrative; namely, that brought forth by a photograph. In doing so, I was hoping that this activity, besides providing a visual glimpse into their everyday work, would generate more symbolic or metaphorical perspectives and nuances on the descriptions of their position as middle managers. Additionally, the photographs played a role in connection to our future interviews since they were used to activate the middle managers' memories and unpack the context surrounding each captured event (Brown *et al*., 2002 in Czarniawska, 2007, p. 68). This echoes a suggestion put forward by Radley and Taylor (2003), who propose that people will articulate experiences through images that would not surface in an interview.

Individual and focus-group interviews

When conducting individual and focus-group interviews, I was largely inspired by an active interview framework as presented by Gubrium and Holstein (1997). This framework rests on the assumption that knowledge is created relationally, between people and between people and 'things' (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2005), and is therefore not an essence residing *in* people for the interviewer to discover. By implication, this framework relies on an understanding of the interview as an active and dynamic social process, an interactional process, through which phenomena are talked into being in the interview setting. This approach is therefore especially attuned to the communicative activity and the stressing of conversation as the machinery of reality construction (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997, p. 7). With reference to the previously outlined communicative constitution of organization perspective (CCO), I view the activity referred to here in the light of CCO's broad definition of communication (Cooren *et al.*, 2012), which entails, besides the talk of people, multiple 'things', such as documents, photos, architecture, space, technology, furniture, symbols, narratives, emotions and more. This means that, alongside the interviewer and interviewee, the continual interaction between many forms of communication is co-constructing the phenomenon in question. Connecting back to

the introductory section of this chapter, this also means that the overall research apparatus, which rests on organizational discourse studies and new materialist theorizing, manifests as concrete actions in the interview setting, in the questions asked, in the positioning of the interviewer and interviewee, in the 'props' brought along to facilitate conversations, but also the reminiscences of times just before the interview and thoughts of the future awaiting etc. – and, in the case of focus groups, in the dynamics between the group's members. I expand upon the concrete developments and implications concerning this (relational) view of the interview and other qualitative methods in Article One.

Individual interviews

The individual interviews were semi-structured (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015), which entailed the development of an interview guide containing a few predefined themes, but with the 'built in' flexibility to explore and pursue any unexpected or interesting topics that developed as a part of the interactions in the interview. The themes all related to the current research interest, but with emphasis on everyday practices and the mundane. Again, echoing an active framework (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997), the mundane, the everyday grind and commonplace interactions are seen as organizing features and, in terms of the middle managers, organizing features of their constructions of middle management. Thus, the guiding questions aimed to invite conversations about concrete events, involving interactions with other people, structures, programmes and other 'things', as well as invitations to co-reflect and co-wonder about their own experience of the mundane, events etc. (Staunæs & Søndergaard, 2005).

Introduced into the interview as 'props', co-producing the phenomenon in question, were photos selected by the interviewees. These photos were taken from their weekly log writings and, as mentioned in the previous section, the aim was to initiate conversations around the narrative presented in the photo, its context and reasons for choosing to take the picture. As such, the activity was inspired by the technique of photo elicitation (Collier & Collier, 1986) and in addition to establishing a focus on context, motivation, relations etc., the photos would often foreground objects, such as books, shelves, office spaces and spark conversations about the organizing properties of 'things'.

Lastly, and also introduced as a form of 'prop', I used vignettes (Ericson, 1986; Miles & Huberman, 1994). These were generated on the basis of field notes and interviews to depict a short and condensed story of the field to which the particular interviewee could relate. The vignettes were abstractions, agential cuts (Barad, 2007) produced by me, framing a theme that I found 'pertinent' or interesting presented in narrative form. The aim was to have the interviewee interact with the presented cut, or version, of a middle-manager reality. I return to vignette writings as a method in the following section.

Informal conversations

Throughout the fieldwork, I had several informal conversations. These were more than mere small-talk, because they had a research focus on middle management, but they were informal in the sense that they evolved ad hoc, and were thus typically unplanned. Clearly, this means that the content of these conversations was initially defined by the 'urge' of field participants to share a reflection or an experience with me. This would also sometimes be prompted by an interest in my observations of a lesson, meeting etc.

Another form of informal conversation would occur following, for instance, a shadowing session, where I would sometimes opt to ask questions about a particular event, to clear up any doubts or to check meaning in terms of something that had occurred or had been said. These chats would sometimes evolve into longer conversations about their everyday life at the school. Usually, I would seize the opportunity to remain in these conversations to explore where they would take us.

Focus groups

As outlined above, many of the underlying assumptions concerning the active interview relate equally to when I was planning and conducting focus groups. In the same manner as with the individual interviews, a focus group rests on the assumption that knowledge is created relationally, between people and between people and 'things' (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2005, p. 10) and is thus an interactional process. What is distinctive, however, is the accentuated focus on the dynamics and interaction primarily between multiple participants, as opposed to the individual interview, when everything occurs between interviewer and interviewee (Bloor, 2001). Therefore, the purpose of the focus group is not to 'go deep' with (multiple) individual answers, but rather to facilitate social interaction and the co-production of knowledge regarding a particular theme through the participants' response to each other (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015, p. 172).

The focus groups were structured around a few broad themes, entailing a headline or set of broad questions, typically followed by some individual reflection time and note-taking and subsequently discussion rounds or group exercises where the participants would have to negotiate, for example, particular 'characteristics' of middle-management work (see photo below), or a prioritized meeting agenda etc.
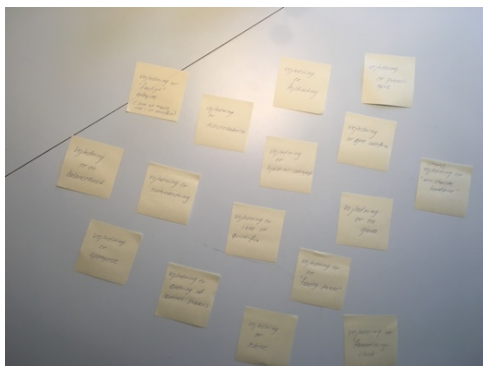
Figure 2: Photo of post-its with small descriptions of middle-management work produced by the participants

The technique of photo eliciting (Collier & Collier, 1986) was likewise introduced into the focus groups that were exclusively with the middle managers. As a part of this, the participants took turns sharing a photo from their everyday work, again taken from their log writings. In this activity, the focus of discussion was on the variety and complexity of their everyday work, as presented in the photos, and not so much on the personal stories or in-depth reflections that emerged during the individual interviews.

Vignettes were also introduced into the particular groups, clearly with respect to the constellation of participants. These considerations concern not causing any harm as a result of the research process (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 213). For instance, when conducting a focus group with school management teams and middle managers, I would provide vignettes that addressed a topic relevant to middle management work containing some pertinence or tension, but with an awareness of power relations and their potential implications in that particular context.

Furthermore, during focus groups involving both middle managers and their teacher colleagues, I decided not to introduce vignettes, due to ethical concerns about causing harm in terms of the future relationships between the middle managers and their teacher colleagues. Thus, I developed themes for these focus groups that took a largely future orientation. That is, I had the participants discuss what would be interesting future avenues of collaboration between middle managers and their colleagues. Besides generating insights into desirable futures, this focus was likewise developed out of ethical concerns about their everyday work after my departure and was an attempt to steer away from discussions about some of the relational implications and difficulties in navigating between being a middle manager and a teacher colleague in this particular group constellation.

Vignette writings

Vignette writings (Ericson, 1986; Jacobsen, 2013b; Miles & Huberman, 1994) were developed as a way for me as a researcher to interact with both the data and the interviewees in the exploration of middle management work. This pursuit was motivated by the ambition to produce a kind of multimodal data that would display a specific agential cut by focusing on a transverse theme that early analysis of the full body of data had revealed (the full body of data being field notes, photos, log writings, interview data and informal conversations).

Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 81) define the concept of the vignette as; "... a focused description of a series of events taken to be representative, typical or emblematic in the case you are doing". In this sense, vignettes are an author's (in this case the researcher's) interpretative point of view, a reduced account that does not represent the original event with all of its features and details, but is an abstraction framing/positing certain analytical themes, issues etc. (Ericson, 1986, p. 150).

The vignettes were specifically developed as a way to retool interviews, meaning that they were used to put forward a particular (author-made) agential cut. However, they were also introduced as a multimodality (Iedema, 2007), taking part in co-producing middle management alongside the participants and the other 'things' that were present in the interview setting. The vignette was aimed at providing a fuller understanding of the complexities of middle-management work, not only relating to one specific situation, but since it was developed by reading across the entire empirical material, it illustrates themes across practices, time and space.

The vignettes were developed for specific interviews and initially consisted of rather broad descriptions, situating middle-management work in a 'recognizable' reality, involving descriptions of common tasks, expectations or events. The introductory part of the vignettes is therefore comprised of the generated data as a whole and does not draw on one particular piece of data. This general 'trait' is emphasized by describing the middle manager in general terms – an unspecified person. Following this, the vignette elaborates upon a particular theme that is relevant to the interviewee or participants in the focus groups. This part is therefore developed on the basis of (personal) data, such as fields notes, informal chats and reflection logs, that concern the particular person or group. The descriptions thus develop into a personal story, a framing of a particular situation, to which I, as the researcher, attribute symbolic value and which is viewed in/through the other (personal) data. See Appendix C for an example of a vignette.[9]

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[9] The vignettes were all originally written in Danish and the example provided is therefore a translated version.

5.4. DATA MANAGEMENT

When initiating my fieldwork, I developed an electronic, empirical log in which I made 'superficial' registrations of 'when, where, who and what' of all data sources. This form of tracing events was undertaken in order to make the generation of data and the data management process transparent. However, the tracings also served as a productive form of preliminary interpretive tool that, clearly, enabled an overview of data sources and the people involved, but also generated insights into immediate themes within and across the data, as I would also list some of the 'local codes' (i.e., matters of interest amongst the participants) followed by initial analytical codes, such as theories or concepts, that the particular piece of data had brought to mind. This activity proved to be very helpful because, throughout the analytical process, I would iterate between these preliminary themes and themes developed during later phases, testifying to my experience of the analytical process as one of constant iterations between early findings, revisiting theory, engagements with the field, the developments of new themes and so on, resembling that of an abductive research analysis strategy (Fuglsang *et al.*, 2003, p. 29).

Transcribing interviews
The data-management process also involved transcribing audio recordings of all the interviews and thus transforming the audio into texts. Although not recorded, the informal conversations with participants were also written up from memory at the earliest opportunity. I transcribed the interview/informal chat material using inspiration from Bloor (2001, p. 62), which corresponds with basic transcription requirements, such as noting pauses, loud utterances, emphasis and unintelligible speech. I kept the editing of text to a bare minimum, with the exception of writing out words in full. This was done to aid the readability of the texts.

While transcribing the audio, I used the margin field to highlight particular themes of interest or other things that sparked wonder while I listened to the interview. I transferred these preliminary themes into the electronic log and, although they were often a mixture of local codes and analytical codes, they mainly reflected my initial theorizing of utterances, addressing why they were categorized as such in the empirical log. Throughout the analytical process, I would sometimes return and refamiliarize myself to these sparks of wonder and the surrounding context, which indicated early 'centres of vibrancy' in the data concerning, for example, certain tensions or particular 'fleshy' utterances, which proved to be beneficial during the analytical process.

After transcribing the audio, I sent the texts to the participants for a quick readthrough. This was done to allow them to comment or nuance utterances, ask questions about anything that prompted concern, etc. Collectively, none of the participants came back to me with comments or questions.

Working with fieldnotes

While engaging in shadowing, I initially developed a data-management system to keep my observation notes relating to the field studies at the two case schools separated. This meant that I kept two distinct notebooks (case school A and B) and had separate computer files for the related electronic write-ups of my handwritten notes, as well as electronic fieldnotes (notes made directly onto the computer).

Within in the process of writing field notes, I created a structure that differentiated between 'loose' and more open-ended categories of observations and emerging analytical constructs. I use the term 'open-ended observation' as a way to highlight my approach towards 'what plays out' when conducting observations. This stance has a long tradition within ethnography and implies approaching the field with a form of 'scepticism', meaning that nothing should be taken for granted or assumed to be uninteresting (Neyland, 2007, p. 100). It can therefore be understood as an underlining aim of remaining open to whatever manifests itself as prominent and important in the everyday intra-actions between middle managers and their surroundings, including the other bodies in the schools, as well as other multimodalities.

The above-mentioned structure had two dimensions, as I attempted to create a balance that would allow for both the messiness of everyday intra-actions and generate structure, accentuating systematic and analytical reflections.

The first dimension was significantly intuitive, messy and draft-like in its appearance, consisting of a mixture of superficial and descriptive notes, as well as mappings of multimodalities 'at play'. Both the descriptive and superficial notes were developed with inspiration from Lofland & Lofland (1995) and materialized as brief jottings or 'memory joggers' to return to later, as well as more detailed descriptions of events – sometimes word-for-word registrations of what was said and at other times just small recaps. The mappings developed later in the fieldwork as I started to become more attuned to all the other 'stuff' playing a part in organizing their everyday work through my continuous engagements with new materialist theorizing (Barad, 2003, 2007).

Despite the loose and more open-ended nature of these observations, I was still aware of my specific research approach and interest. This means that, throughout the observations, I aimed to create a process and context-sensitive focus in the spirit of the study's research question by foregrounding how work practices emerged in/through the middle managers' intra-actions with colleagues, school management, other middle managers, me 'the researcher', as well as all the multimodalities that took part in this becoming in the middle.

Parallel to this attunement to the more messy aspects of everyday life, I also included a seemingly 'invasive' category of notes that would often take the quite concrete form of a speech bubble. These notes typically had a more reflective character involving affective descriptions of feelings and thoughts prompted by the observation,

theoretical perspectives and also things or events that for some reason caught my attention. This invasive category also came to encompass the later attunement to the multimodalities present, which is what I coin as 'mapping'.

The second dimension of notetaking took place as close to the actual observation in time and space as possible, and involved writing up the handwritten notes into an electronic text. The purpose of this immediate post-observation write-up was, again with inspiration from Lofland & Lofland (1995), to register thoughts and reflections that occurred in relation to the observation and that I either had not managed to note down during the actual observation, or included thoughts and reflections that did not manifest themselves until later (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 91).

In addition to the handwritten notes, I would sometimes opt to write my fieldnotes directly onto the computer, if the shadowing situation allowed this, i.e., did not draw too much attention; for example, in large meetings where I could sit at the back of the room. Thus, the fieldwork produced two types of electronic texts, corresponding to the written-up fieldnotes and notes taken directly on the computer. Even though the latter type of notes was already in the form of a written-up electronic text, I would still return to these texts upon the observation and add reflections etc., similar to the process when writing up the handwritten notes.

This other dimension furthermore implied some initial endeavours at data processing and early analysis, since I systematically introduced an analytical category with the aim of reading across the fieldnotes to seek potential relations between the different types of notes and my early analytical reflections in relation to all of the above.[10]

These analytical notes were, alongside with local codes (consisting also of mappings), transferred into the empirical log of 'when, where, who and what' and would serve as a form of memory bank of themes and relations in the data and used as an offset for forthcoming analysis.

Working with reflection logs
Similarly to the data management regarding other field methods, upon receiving the weekly log writings from the participants, I would enter local codes and analytical codes into the empirical log. Included in this write-up were codes produced through the inclusion of the photos that they had added to their log. This visual element facilitated an attunement, during the early stages of the fieldwork, to the participation of materialities, because they would often depict body-less situations, such as a bookshelf, work folders, or an office space as organizing features of their everyday

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[10] In the electronic texts, the 'invasive' category is marked in bold font and the analytical category is marked with the colour red.

practices. As such, the photos played an 'equal part' alongside the participant-produced text in the logs in determining the local and analytical codes.

Subsequent to all of the above data-management activities, I imported all the texts (log writings, fieldnotes, transcripts) into the data management program NVivo. Using NVivo enabled the possibility of producing codes/theme across the whole data set and, as mentioned earlier, there was an iterative movement between NVivo and the empirical log. The latter proved to be particularly relevant in terms of honing a multimodal focus in NVivo, since this is where the meaning-making relating to the photos and mappings of multimodalities was 'present'. This iterative process made it possible to investigate middle management positions as a multi-sited and complex phenomenon and through the continuous analytical movements to gain insights into the rich and nuanced (multimodal) data that made up the respective codes/themes. I will describe this process in depth in the coming section "Doing analysis".

Since the research was conducted in Denmark and all the participants were native Danish speakers, the data was written up in Danish and then, for the purpose of article writing, translated into English. When translating the data, I was committed to being as true as possible to the words spoken by the participants.

As the standard codes of consent and confidentiality was followed in this study (Ferdinand *et al.*, 2007), and the participants were fully informed about the overall purpose of the research, at the request of the case schools, I made a verbal agreement not to disclose any names of schools or participants; thus, the data was fully anonymized. Furthermore, the data was stored in accordance with research guidelines at the two collaborating research institutions taking part in this research project: Aalborg University and University College Copenhagen.

5.4.1. 'DOING' ANALYSIS

When doing analysis, I did not distinguish between the different forms of data. That is, I decided to 'equate' the entire set of material and view it all as meaning-making practices emerging in/through the intra-activity of discourse-materialities (multimodalities), such as bookshelves, emotions, presentations, relationships, tropes, bodies, spaces, discourses etc.

This process was kickstarted with inspiration from thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hughes *et al.*, 2017) and involves a theoretically inspired coding driven by the study's research questions. Thus, this orientation accentuates an analytical attention that, in relation to the current analytical contributions (Articles Two and Three), highlights the tracing of the intra-activity of discourse-materiality regarding emerging

middle management positions.[11] Thus, this attention also illustrates the research's considerations around the inclusion of data in the analysis, because all data relating to this demarcation is included (Dahler-Larsen, 2008).

Although the analytical attention derived from theorizing was clearly present during the analytical process, the analysis was, as previously mentioned, also informed by early, and primarily inductively driven, codes/themes documented in the empirical log. This is just to say that, while the following descriptions of the analytical process may seem linear, with one step leading to the next like pearls on a string, the actual process was far messier and (as already mentioned) entailed numerous readings and re-readings of the data, as well as iterations between the empirical log, coding patterns in NVivo, revisiting theory and field engagements.

The analytical movements leading to data coding patterns, or clusters, that developed into the analysis presented in Articles Two and Three, commenced with a kind of pre-phase of familiarizing myself with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). As noted earlier, this began while I was writing up field notes, transcribing interviews and noticing sparks of wonder. Following this phase came the 'formal' first phase of coding (open coding), meaning that, in part guided by my sparks of wonder, I started a more in-depth reading and coding of interesting features and repeated configurations of meaning related to the study's overall research question. This involved developing as many codes as possible that were relevant to the analytical focus. During this process, individual extracts of data were included in as many different codes as seemed fit. Thus, an extract was sometimes only coded once and other extracts were coded several times (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89).

The second phase entailed a form of sorting of the different codes into potential categories. This means that I would read across the different codes and consider how some might form an overarching category. This developed into a cluster of codes concerning matters related to, for example, middle managers' identity work (Article Two). By way of illustration, the overarching category 'seizing one's position', described in Article Two, was made up of a cluster of codes relating to particular extracts derived from across the whole set of data. These codes had been written up with particular labels elucidating situated and embodied practices related to the given category, such as, 'claiming space(s)' and 'performing availability'.

The categories developed during this phase, in connection with the two analytical article contributions, were broken down, so to speak, and in this way displayed the cluster of codes and the extracted (embodied and multimodal) data making-up these categories (Hughes *et al.*, 2017). This helped me to 'see' the intra-active components

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[11] This analytical attention is further specified in Articles Two and Three as relating, respectively, to middle managers' identity work and organizings of work corresponding to the study's supporting research questions.

that took part in constituting the identity work (Article Two) and organizing of work (Article Three), and hence indicated a particular becoming in the middle. A becoming, conditioned by all the other 'stuff' (discourse-materialities) that takes part in the everyday work practices of middle managers, besides hierarchical forms of organizing, such as materialities, emotions, discourses, cultures, politics etc.

Figure 3, below, is a visualization of the analytical process illustrated through an example taken from Article Two concerning the identity work of middle managers. The same procedure was used in Article Three, and demonstrates iterative movements between initial/open coding, clusters of codes and overarching categories, leading to particular traces of middle management positions emerging in/through discourse-materiality intra-activity across daily work practices.
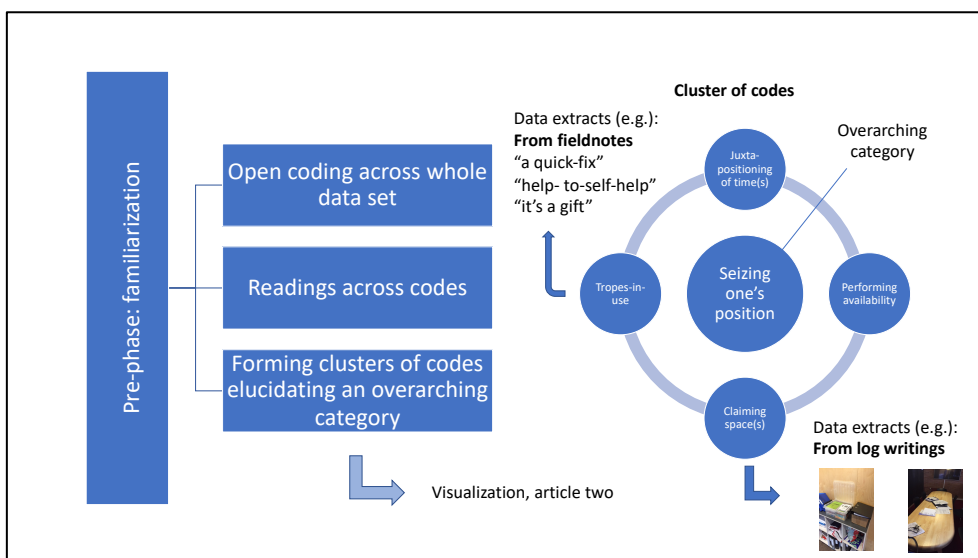
Figure 3 Visualization of the analytical process

As described in section 4.3, where I lay out my analytical strategy, analytically approaching the phenomenon of middle management positions through organizational discourse studies and new materialist theorizing produced an attunement to intra-activity, which has two dimensions in regard to the analytical process.

Firstly, my thinking with intra-activity is illustrated by the relation between codes and categories because, upon being drawn up, the categories are 'broken down' into intra-acting components comprising of extracts from the multimodal data elucidating a situated and embodied practice relating to the given category. In the above visualization, these components are performing availability, juxta-positionings of times(s), tropes-in-use and claiming space(s), and thus they display the collated data

that takes part in constituting a particular feature, or agential cut, regarding the identity work of middle managers.

Next, my thinking with intra-activity concerns that which unfolds across categories, meaning that the relations between categories helped me to 'see' the precarious and emerging boundaries of the phenomenon that is being intra-acted; here, the identity work of middle managers. Appendices D and E give an overview of the main categories and code clusters that form the basis for the analytical contributions in the two articles, and furthermore present an empirical example from the related code cluster.

This section has demonstrated the analytical process that formed the basis for the two analytical contributions in this dissertation, presented in Articles Two and Three. However, another part of this research's contribution is to develop new methods to encompass the empirical embedding of discourse-materiality intra-activity. Thus, I will now turn to the second part of this chapter, which comprises a methodological contribution, which is the dissertation's first article. This article demonstrates a particular researcher practice and sensitivity towards multimodality for the purpose of innovating empirical methods and data modes by which to approach the complexities of discourse-materiality relations when doing fieldwork.

5.5. ARTICLE ONE

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Please note that this article has been edited to comply with the formatting of this dissertation and therefore differs in that respect from the published version.

Title: Retooling methods for approaching discourse-materiality relations: A new materialist framework of multimodal sensitivity

Abstract

Purpose – While recent theoretical discussions around discourse-materiality relationality have facilitated important conceptual and analytical advancements within the broader field of CMS, less progress has been made methodologically with regard to innovating empirical methods and data modes. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to contribute to strengthening the methodological focus in the literature when grappling with the relationality of discourse-materiality and co-constitution. This includes a method-retooling framework inspired by new materialism.

Design/methodology/approach – In this article, the authors engage at the methodological level by developing a method-retooling framework that combines insights from organizational discourse studies and new materialist thinking. This framework enables a retooling of existing methods to become sensitive to multimodality and offers two concrete examples that were developed during fieldwork for a multi-sited and multi-method case study in 2018.

Findings – Based on the framework for retooling methods for multimodality, two illustrations are offered. These include retooling interviews by employing multimodal vignettes, and retooling observations by using multimodal mappings. They are unfolded and discussed regarding their appropriation of discourse-materiality relationality.

Originality/value – This paper includes original research and method developments – adding a critical focus on the methodological aspects and potential advancements that are necessary in the wake of the ongoing debates around discourse-materiality across CMS, and specifically within studies of organizational discourse and CCO. By suggesting a framework, the authors stimulate methodological explorations and contribute to furthering method developments that are equal to the rich conceptual progress made within the field.

Keywords: Methodology, discourse, materiality, co-constitution/relationality, new materialism, multimodality

5.5.1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the past two decades, vivid discussions about the relationship between discourse and materiality have emerged across critical management studies (CMS) (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011; Hardy & Grant, 2012; Iedema, 2011; Kuhn & Putnam, 2014; Mumby, 2011). They address complex issues regarding the conceptualizations and explorations of discourse and materiality as, for example, isolated, correlating, opposing, or entangled and co-constitutive features of contemporary organizational life (Philips & Oswick, 2012; Putnam, 2015). While such discussions have enabled important cross-disciplinary conceptual and analytical advancements, resulting, for example, in the development of co-constitutive concepts of materiality and discourse (Iedema, 2007; Kuhn *et al*., 2017), less attention has been directed towards associated methodological advancements (Phillips & Oswick, 2012). Although the need to develop new empirical methods to approach discourse-materiality relations is also recognized in this literature (Hardy & Grant, 2012; Iedema, 2007), explicit methodological debates about such challenges and the innovation of practical tools remain more marginal.

In this paper, we aim to push this agenda further by paying explicit attention to empirical methodological challenges – which are implicitly connected to the conceptual advancements of discourse-materiality relations. We pursue this by asking: *how can we develop empirical methods sensitive to the discourse-materiality relations that make up organizational reality constructions?* In answering this question, we develop a framework for retooling methods inspired by the above-mentioned conceptual developments within the broader field of CMS. In doing so, we also draw upon methodological innovations emerging from relational, new-materialist approaches (Barad, 2003, 2007; Benozzo *et al*., 2019; Hardy & Thomas, 2015; Iedema, 2007; Kuhn *et al*., 2017; Orlikowski & Scott, 2015; Plotnikof & Zandee 2016). This framework facilitates a sensitivity to the situated, ongoing and constitutive discourse-materiality relations in everyday organizational life. In particular, we elaborate upon the concept of multimodality (Iedema, 2007; Plotnikof & Zandee, 2016) and combine it with insights from extant relationality (Kuhn *et al*., 2017) frameworks in order to retool methods for participating in such co-constitutive processes. We explore the potential of this framework using examples from a case study of the becoming and organizing of a new informal middle-management positioning of selected teachers that has recently emerged in educational contexts due to a major school reform in Denmark in 2013 (UVM, 2013). In particular, we illustrate two examples of retooling methods for multimodality in order to discuss how this may help to sensitize a researcher-becoming-embedded and embodied in specific local realities, and hence facilitate the co-production of data, including the diverse multimodalities (human, non-human, verbal, visual, bodily, digitally etc.) that make up empirical realities – in our case an emerging middle-management positioning.

This paper, then, contributes to the broader field of CMS, and in particular to debates in studies of organizational discourse and the communicative constitution of organization (CCO) that call for more relational approaches to advancing knowledge on the co-constitution of discourse-materiality (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Kuhn *et al*., 2017; Philips & Oswick, 2012; Prasad *et al*., 2016; Putnam, 2015). It does so by extending the conceptual discussions to include more explicit and practical methodological concerns, thus offering insights into the potentials and challenges of retooling methods for multimodality. We review the literature on discourse-materiality debates in critical management studies, with a specific focus on implicit methodological issues. Furthermore, we develop our framework for retooling methods for multimodality combining organizational discourse and new materialist thinking, and we illustrate and discuss its use through the empirical case of informal middle-management positionings and organizing practices within an educational context. Our findings elucidate how retooling methods for multimodality can help to embed and embody research practices in our empirical realities and produce insights that will contribute to advancing methodological developments that are equal to the rich conceptual developments made within the field. This is followed by a discussion of the potentials and challenges of retooling and its impact on future research practices.

5.5.2. STUDIES OF THE RELATIONALITY OF DISCOURSE-MATERIALITY WITHIN CMS

Following the linguistic turn, the premise that discourse constitutes organization has generated a rich array of studies on the dynamic construction of everyday life across the broader field of CMS, and more specifically within organizational discourse studies (Grant *et al.,* 2004; Kuhn, 2014; Phillips & Oswick, 2012). This development challenges dominant assumptions that organizations are *a priori* entities, by arguing that language constructs rather than reflects organizational realities (Cooren *et al*., 2011; Kuhn & Putnam, 2014; Phillips & Oswick, 2012). However, during the past ten years, rich conceptual debates have emerged (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011; Hardy & Thomas, 2015; Mumby, 2011; Schoeneborn *et al*., 2019) which question the (over-)emphasis on discourse and its mono-modal focus at the expense of materiality. These discussions explore, for example, the extent to which the relationship between discourse and materiality can be conceptualized as isolated, opposing or correlating and co-constitutive features of contemporary organizational life (Iedema, 2007; Kuhn *et al*., 2017; Philips & Oswick, 2012; Putnam, 2015). Indeed, these debates have resulted in productive theoretical discussions within CMS (Hardy & Grant, 2012; Iedema, 2011; Mumby, 2011), as well as attempts to advance concepts of discourse-materiality relations (Hardy & Thomas, 2015; Kuhn *et al*., 2017; Putnam, 2015). In taking stock of the situation, Phillips and Oswick (2012, p.470) stress that:

> The problem is not just the need to work across levels that has been so often discussed, but also working across epistemological positions to move to a position that embraces the "discourse *and* materiality" and the "discourse *as*

materiality" positions. By widening the methods used and bringing together methods that focus on the discursive and the material, organizational discourse analysis can make much more of a contribution to our understanding of organization and organizing.

Following this, a varied stream of conceptual efforts has led to approaching the relations between discourse and materiality in terms of being, for example, imbricated or infused, thereby treating discourse and materiality as constitutive forces that become relationally joined (Kuhn & Putnam, 2014; Putnam, 2015). Amongst these efforts, some studies specifically theorize communication as the interactive process through which discourse and materiality imbricate in dialectic movements of texts and conversations, creating networks of organizing. Such approaches often adhere to a communicative constitution of organization (CCO) perspective (Ashcraft *et al*., 2009; Kuhn & Putnam, 2014). This CCO perspective is likely to indicate an explicit concern with materiality, particularly within its 'Montreal School' (Cooren *et al*., 2011; Schoeneborn *et al*., 2019). Other studies, also interested in discourse-materiality relations, argue – often with reference to Foucault (see e.g., Hardy & Thomas, 2015; Mumby & Plotnikof, 2019; Plotnikof & Pedersen, 2019; Thomas & Hardy, 2011; Thomas *et al*., 2011) – that: "discursive practices cannot be pried apart from the material practices that envelope and interpolate them. It is this fusion of the discursive and the material that generates the power effects of discourse" (Hardy & Thomas, 2015, p. 690). These latter scholars see the discourse-materiality fusion as co-constitutive of organizing and demonstrate how it works through local resources such as bodies, space, objects and practices, although without rejecting a mono-modal focus for analytical purposes.

In line with this, others make the case for always including the multimodality of discourse (Iedema, 2003, 2007; Plotnikof & Zandee, 2016). In particular, Iedema (2007) has argued for such a redefinition, demanding a research focus on the co-emerging aspect of discourse-materiality, while acknowledging that discourse is always multimodal and historically contingent. Iedema's perspective on how to describe and understand processes of organizing invites in the multimodalities (human as well as non-human) that produce organizing across time and space. This is also taken up by others (e.g. Plotnikof & Zandee, 2016), who unfold a multimodal discourse concept to focus analytically on the interplay of communication, bodies, technologies, visuals etc. Such turns to multimodality find inspiration in new materialist theorist Karen Barad (2003, 2007), who posits that neither discourse nor materiality exist prior to each other – as they only become 'something' when entangled in intra-actions (Barad, 2007, pp.151–152):

> [M]ateriality is discursive . . . just as discursive practices are always already material (i.e. they are ongoing material (re)configurings of the world). Discursive practices and material phenomena do not stand in a

relationship of externality to one another; rather, the material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity.

Following new-materialist inspirations, scholars have advanced the conceptual elaboration of the relationality of discourse-materiality (Kuhn *et al*., 2017) as the primary force. This means that discursive and material realities are considered to be ontologically inseparable features, always communicated together and more or less intractable aspects of one another (Hardy & Thomas, 2015; Iedema, 2007; Kuhn & Putnam, 2014; Putnam, 2015). Undeniably, these efforts have contributed to a strengthened 'turn to materiality' in organizational discourse studies, as well as within the broader field of CMS (Hardy & Grant, 2012; Iedema, 2011; Kuhn *et al*., 2017; Putnam, 2015).

In particular, 'meaning' as more-than-discursive is enhanced within this turn, along with a focus on how materiality materializes, possesses, acquires meaning and comes to *matter* through the relationality of discourse-materiality. In effect, from such a perspective materiality becomes meaningful and matters as 'some*thing*', because it is constructed through a complex, power-infused entanglement of discursive materialities and materializing discourses that are enfolding within and across time and space (Mumby, 2011). Although conceptual and analytical efforts have emerged, less attention has been paid to advancing empirical methods for the study of this relationality in various organizational settings, despite this being a pressing concern in many of the initial discussions (see, e.g., Hardy & Grant, 2012; Philips & Oswick, 2012). Furthermore, while we know that new materialist theorizing has contributed with methodological innovations in neighbouring critical traditions, such as cultural studies, posthuman psychology and education (e.g. Benozzo *et al*., 2019; Dale & Burrell, 2007; Højgaard & Søndergaard, 2011; Juelskjær & Staunæs, 2016), and within the critical turns in the social sciences more generally (e.g. Childers, 2013; Fox & Alldred, 2015; Taylor & Hughes, 2016), methodological advancements inspired by this relational view within the field of CMS are nevertheless under-explored. This, we argue, is unfortunate, because such steps could facilitate pivotal advancements in terms of empirical methods that not only expand upon and entangle directly with the conceptual progress, but may also reflect back, or rather inflect and intra-act with, further conceptual developments and discussions. By drawing upon new materialist inspirations beyond theoretical efforts, including methodological innovations and developments in other research traditions, this article aims to move this agenda further along within CMS (Bramming *et al*., 2012; Kuhn & Putnam, 2014; Kuhn *et al*., 2017; Philips & Oswick, 2012).

5.5.3. TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK FOR RETOOLING METHODS FOR MULTIMODALITY

In this article, we develop a method-development framework for the investigation of the relationality of discourse-materiality by suggesting a particular researcher

positioning while conducting fieldwork – a positioning that emerges as an embedded and embodied way of becoming in the field with a sensitivity towards multiple agencies and their multimodalities. This positioning does not foreground human intentionality, although indeed, this is one form of agency amongst many and is inherently part of knowledge production. Rather, it is the positioning of a research practice that acknowledges the always already entangled multiple agencies and their multimodalities in the relational becoming of a phenomenon, in which we as researchers are also entangled. As a consequence, this pursuit requires the researcher to retool empirical methods to become sensitive to the multiple agencies by – we will argue – their multimodalities, for which we develop a framework. Inherently, this responds to calls for creative methodological explorations (e.g. Hardy & Grant, 2012; Phillips & Oswick, 2012) since the 'messy' and dis/ordered nature of discourse-materiality relationality necessitates a variety of methods that embrace this complexity. To do this, in the following we will briefly introduce a few of the central new-materialist concepts of Karen Barad (2003, 2007, 2008) in order to develop our framework for retooling methods for multimodality. This includes discourse-materiality entanglements as intra-active phenomena, as well as agential cuts and (re)configurations.

Barad's new material apparatus relies on agential realism (2003) – a theorizing about the study of practices of knowing in being; namely, an ontological and epistemological fusion – onto-epistemology (Barad, 2007). This is a cross-disciplinary onto-epistemology inspired by Niels Bohr's quantum physics and Foucault's poststructuralism, along with its later queer turn represented by Butler's and Haraway's feminist readings. In her work, Barad undertakes readings across these fields and concepts, and thereby develops a framework for investigating the entanglement of discursive matter and material discourse as intra-acting phenomena.

The concept of entanglement (Barad, 2007) highlights a fundamental premise of relationality; namely, the constituting inseparability of discourse-materiality: "To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence. Existence is not an individual affair" (Barad, 2007 p. 9). Related to this is the concept of intra-action (Barad, 2003) – which she proposes as an alternative to the notion of interaction: "...which presumes the prior existence of independent entities/relata" (Barad, 2003, p. 815). With this concept, Barad emphasizes that distinct entities and agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action, meaning that they only become 'distinct' in relation to their mutual entanglement. In other words, intra-action articulates a co-constitutive perspective, because it is through intra-activity that discourse-materiality relations entangle and co-constitute (Hughes *et al*., 2017).

Through the concept of intra-action, and its relational scope, we are therefore able to approach the multiple and multimodal agencies in the becoming of a phenomenon, since it is only through its relation to other 'things' that anything comes to exist. This

means that an organizational phenomenon – in our case, an emerging informal middle-management positioning of teachers (which we will describe below) – only comes into existence through particular discourse-materiality relations and is constantly (re)enacted, and thus ever-unfolding, emerging, contingent and precarious. Clearly, then, these assumptions do not privilege any particular forms of agency in the production of the 'real' (or a phenomenon), but see all multimodalities, both human and non-human (verbal and non-verbal), as potential means of agency.

Based on this, we elaborate our framework for retooling methods for multimodality by more specifically drawing upon two further concepts of Barad's new materialism: agential cuts and (re)configurations. The concept of the agential cut (Barad, 2003) illustrates that it is through specific, local, discourse-materiality intra-actions that distinctions occur, and some agencies become meaningful, real and performative as they come to matter in relation to each other. In other words, agencies come to mean and matter through the ways in which they intra-act, and are thereby cut together and apart – and in doing so manifest a given phenomenon. Furthermore, through the agential cuts, a particular (re)configuration (Barad, 2007) presents itself. A (re)configuration here refers to the locally intra-acted meaning and matter of a phenomenon as it comes into existence at a specific space and time by means of its agential cut, which relates to, and both continues and discontinues, other space and time (re)configurations (Barad, 2013). This means that the relational becoming of organizational phenomena is characterized by simultaneous forces of continuity and discontinuity, intra-acting processes entangling across past, present and future. Thus, from this onto-epistemological perspective, a phenomenon comes into existence when agencies of discourse-materiality are cut together-apart from what already is. Rather than having a clear ending and beginning, (re)configurations therefore do not appear in well-defined moments and are not only **radical** ruptures or changes. Rather, they can be expressed in many ways; for example, as adjustments, nuances, re-orientations, restructurings, deeper understandings, repetitions, features, versions etc. (Plauborg, 2018, p. 332).

The above conceptualizations of the discourse-materiality relationality in constituting organizational life have been previously suggested at an analytical level, as argued earlier, but in this article we attempt to use them for developing empirical methods. In effect, this means that, since no agency, whether discursive or material, has an *a priori* existence, but all agencies arise from their mutual entanglement, it becomes pertinent to develop methods sensitive to a multitude of agentic forces, and for the researcher to attune to the various agencies that become agentic (e.g., bodies, artefacts, decor, relations, talk, odours etc.), that is, come to matter, while producing data. This, we argue, involves retooling methods for multimodality.

Inspired by new materialism, and following Iedema (2003, 2007), and Plotnikof and Zandee (2016), multimodality – meaning multiple modes of expression – directs the attention towards a multiplicity of agentic communication modes (human, non-

human, verbal, non-verbal) that form meanings and matters. As Fairhurst and Grant (2010, p. 197) stress: "...a multimodal focus pushes the data gathering and analysis to be sensitive to the symbolic, material, and/or the institutional – and future research looks to be headed in this direction." While Iedema does not discuss the methodological implications of this explicitly, Plotnikof and Zandee (2016, p. 152) do pick up this line of inquiry and argue that developing methods sensitive to multimodality: "helps with focusing on constitutive dynamics and effects without demanding *a priori* deterministic definitions; rather it allows us to approach organizational phenomena as they emerge empirically." Developing a multimodal approach, then, means abandoning a strictly mono-modal discursive or material focus, and where Barad's theorizing offers a conceptual framework for conceiving the constitutive dynamics of relational becoming, the concept of multimodality helps to facilitate an embedded and embodied research practice that acknowledges precisely these constitutive dynamics.

Following these points, we suggest a framework for retooling methods for multimodality, which helps to sensitize and attune research practices to the intra-activity of multiple discourse-materiality relations and agencies at play locally and across time(s) and space(s) (Vásques & Cooren, 2013), whether they be symbolic, linguistic, material, visual etc. This implies an embedding of research that attunes towards the becoming connections between specific embodied multimodalities, that is, an embedding that turns towards what happens when multimodalities become entangled, agentic, and come to matter. This may well include studying multimodalities that are sometimes subtle, sometimes tangible. For example, phenomena that are expressed discursively and practically, but also those that are left 'unsaid', marginalized, ignored or silenced. It means noticing tangible matters, such as materials, notebooks and technologies, but also more intangible ones, such as the intra-actions between bodies, practices, affective aspects etc. In this sense, the researcher has to engage in a form of 'empirical multimodal intra-activity' by attuning to the emerging agencies at play as they come to mean and matter in agential cuts and (re)configurations.

Within the framework for retooling methods for multimodality that we propose, the retooling can be achieved in many ways. For example, an interview can be retooled by inviting in multimodalities, such as the decor, post-its, policy documents and vignettes, which, via the relationality of discourse-materiality, intra-act and (re)configure a given issue. A participant log can be retooled by including photos and shared authorship. Observations can acknowledge matters of affect or include 'not being there' by using technology, e.g., video recordings, email diaries etc. By implication, retooling methods for multimodality means not assigning primacy to human agency while 'out there', but instead focusing on what is materialized in practice – intra-acted in/through both human and non-human multimodalities. By retooling our methods, we acknowledge the matters that constitute the realities in which we live, when we live them. Below, we will unpack some examples of retooling

methods for multimodality in greater detail – in relation to our specific empirical research project.

5.5.4. SETTING THE SCENE: RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHOD DEVELOPMENT

Research context

To further illustrate and discuss this framework and its use in retooling methods, we draw on a case study conducted by one of the authors in the Danish education sector during 2018–2019. This research project questions a new informal middle-management positioning of teachers. This has manifested as ideals of 'teacher-leaders' and 'best among peers', which have recently emerged within many education sectors in the wake of international education ranking systems, such as PISA. In a Nordic context, this has led to the creation of headteachers, team leaders, teacher leaders and other informal management positionings within local educational contexts. This case study focuses on matters of positionality that emerged in relation to such an informal middle-management positioning. In Denmark, selected teachers within primary and lower secondary education have been given increasing organizational responsibility, with the general aim of helping to organize local expertise and achieve improvements in schools. The primary task of these teachers is still teaching, and most of their working hours are still spent performing this activity. The new responsibilities are therefore a form of 'add-on'. Concretely, this means that the selected teachers, who are intimately aware of the core issues of instruction, are tasked with enhancing and promoting certain educational initiatives within the school, and therefore amongst their colleagues. Examples include boosting core-subject development or cultivating local professional learning via collegial supervision, coaching and mentoring. Since the most recent Danish school reform in 2013, these teachers have also become key actors in supporting and implementing educational initiatives relating to this reform and its specific district translations. Indeed, this development positions these teachers in a new way, with varying degrees of informal and shared management responsibilities. It thus alters the traditional positioning of a teacher, including issues relating to their new extended responsibilities as well as issues of collegiate social dynamics relating to this extension.

The fieldwork concerning the case study of this new teacher positioning took place during the autumn of 2018, over the course of five months. Due to the study's discourse-materiality perspective on this new positioning, as constituted in emerging communicative processes and practices involving multiple multimodalities, the fieldwork was designed as a multi-sited and multi-method task aimed at following the constituting discursive-material intra-actions of the specific and local enactments. The primary participants were five teachers who were enacting the middle-management positioning in question, and secondary participants were teacher colleagues and school management, the latter primarily participating in interview settings.

When initially entering the organizational settings, it quickly became clear that the everyday practice of these teachers' new positioning was very much tied to their primary practice of being a teacher. This made the transition between being a teacher and a teacher-with-extra-responsibilities 'soft', not always visible, and hence sometimes blurred – thus, it was a practice that seemed to be exemplified by not having a clear beginning or ending. Typically, they had no designated workspace or office, no set office hours, they had very differentiated tasks and responsibilities and were 'visible' as a teacher-with-extra-responsibilities to varying degrees amongst their colleagues. These circumstances framed our initial curiosity and generated a need to develop methods sensitive to the 'blurred aspects' and the meshing of matter that made up this positioning.

Research methods: retooling interviews and observations for multimodality
Exploring the constituting intra-activity related to this new positioning is an endeavour that does not centre on following tracks to discover some kind of 'position-essence'. Rather, it is an exploration that focuses on: "...trying to understand what pops up when connections are established; that is, when (re)configurations in intra-active movements occur" (Plauborg, 2018, p. 326). As previously mentioned, this means being sensitive to multiple multimodalities, whether subtle or tangible, and recognizing them as part of the mutual shaping of a phenomenon: what is said, what is not said, policy texts materializing in local translations and manifesting in practice, the absence of a workspace, materials or notebooks, technology (e.g., iPads, smartboards used in presentations), the decor, the (inter-)actions of teachers, pupils and management, body language, affective aspects etc. are all potential intra-acting multimodalities when the teachers enact their positioning. In other words, an extensive apparatus of intra-actions constitutes this positioning, which requires methods that are sensitive to exactly this. In effect, the methods we developed were designed to encompass the above, and in the forthcoming unfolding of our concrete grappling with retooling methods for multimodality, we will exemplify with two method-developments centring on, respectively, exploratory interviews and a form of participant observation.

As a way to retool exploratory interviews, which we developed for this study to make them sensitive to multimodal intra-actions, we used vignettes (Ericson, 1986; Jacobsen, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994) as inspiration. This pursuit was motivated by an ambition to produce a kind of multimodal data that would elucidate a specific agential cut, made up of intra-actions across practices, times and spaces, and focusing on a transverse theme that early analysis of the full body of data had revealed (the full body of data being: field notes, photos, log writings, other interview data and informal 'talks'). Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 81) define the vignette as: "... a focused description of a series of events taken to be representative, typical or emblematic in the case you are doing". In this sense, vignettes are a result of an author's (in this case the researcher's) agential cut of data, an account that represents, not the original event with all its features and details, but an abstraction positing certain empirical doings

and sayings (Ericson, 1986, p. 150). Thus, retooling interviews for multimodality through vignettes makes it possible to produce data as an agential cut – inherently characterized by non-linearity. Thus, this use of the vignette differs from its origins, as presented by Ericson (1986), in that it is not a representational description of events: "in the natural sequence of their occurrence in real time" (Ericson, 1986, p. 156). Rather, the vignette manifests a heterogeneous agential cut, each with its own rhythm, length and intensity (Benozzo *et al.*, 2019).

When introduced in the interview, the vignette itself develops agency, intra-acting with other (human as well as non-human) agencies in the relational becoming of the phenomenon in question. Relating to our fieldwork, other forms of agency were, for example, the interview room and the layout of its furniture, alluding to its primary function as a meeting room, the interview conversation, the researcher, the interviewee, and selected photos exemplifying everyday work situations that the interviewee was invited to bring.

When we retool observation as a method, we draw on shadowing techniques, a mobile form of observation; a way of doing research that 'mirrors' the mobility of everyday organizational life (Czarniawska, 2007, p. 20). This allows for a direct experience of the enactment of a given agential cut, through which specific qualities emerge as defining, and (re)configurations unfold. For example, we can produce data of 'the un-said' and more affective matters, such as (visibly) physical unease and struggles with teachers' experience when positioned in an unfamiliar situation requiring them to observe their colleagues' teaching. Or by registering the subtle changes in language-use when, during breaks, teachers shift from being a 'normal' teacher and colleague to being a headteacher. These examples of multimodalities are nothing in themselves – they have no separable existence, no separate agency. They only gain meaning in relation to something else, and through this relation they come to (temporarily) mean and matter as characteristics of the positioning in question via an agential cut. For example, the visible unease becomes meaningful via its relation to the task of having to observe and evaluate a colleague. Retooling observations for multimodality, then, involves 'tagging along' and registering intra-acting multimodalities, both tangible and subtle – that is, retooling observation for multimodality involves a form of agential mapping of the intra-activities that (re)configure the meanings and matters at hand.

We posit that the retooling of observations enables a data production of intra-active becoming, as retooling demands the researcher to explore *in vivo* how the relationality of discourse-materiality entangles across multimodalities, e.g., practices, artefacts, bodies, talk-in-interaction etc. The retooling is thus sensitive to specific agential cuts that (re)configure the organizational phenomena under study. In this sense, our efforts to retool observations through mapping differ from vignette writings, as the sensitivity to multimodality is here attuned within naturally occurring work situations, and within a research-initiated conversation between an interviewee and interviewer. Although

they differ in their empirical settings both examples of retooling include a multimodal sensitizing, are themselves agentic in the data production and therefore take part in (exploring as well as) intra-acting a given phenomenon.

The unfolding of the two retooled methods has been chosen as an illustrative example, since it unfolds how retooling methods can be done in, respectively, *in-vivo* settings (observation) and *in-vitro* environments (exploratory interviews), emphasizing that it is not only in naturally occurring contexts that we can explore discourse-materiality intra-activity, but also in researcher-initiated ones.

5.5.5. RETOOLING INTERVIEWS FOR MULTIMODALITY

In the following case study example, a multimodal vignette is constructed and introduced into an interview setting, allowing the interviewee, teacher Laura, photos brought by Laura, the interview room, the researcher and the non-linear temporalities of the vignette to intra-act a (re)configuration of Laura's new positioning. This means that the vignette, alongside the other multimodalities at play, becomes an agency that is simultaneously shaping and shaped by Laura's positioning.

The theme of the vignette centres on the positioning negotiations and struggles of being both a colleague and a form of headteacher and is entitled: *"Co-practitioner, expert or both?"* In the first part of the vignette, the scene is set by presenting a 'familiar world', with special emphasis on intra-acting multimodalities; practices, space and atmosphere. These descriptions relate more broadly to the data as a whole, written in the third person and not drawing on any particular piece of data, but a cut together-apart accumulation of observed situations and informal talk:

> When a headteacher has to coach/mentor a colleague, there are many things to consider. One of these things relates to the message or the concrete feedback that one has to give (the content). Others deal with how to communicate or deliver this feedback. Sometimes the hard part is not to come up with what feedback to give, but to actually give it (vignette, Laura: "Co-practitioner, expert or both?")

In the following, the vignette intensifies the theme more concretely with reference to specific discourse-materiality (re)configurations of some of the struggles regarding the positioning process. This part of the vignette builds on data produced while shadowing Laura as she gave feedback to two fellow teachers after her observation of their class instruction, and her attempt to find a balance between being an 'expert' – giving expert advice and facilitating professional learning – and a colleague offering friendly advice:

> Nolan [Laura's fellow headteacher, who was also participating in the feedback session] continues in a milder tone: "we're only saying this to

kick-start some reflections". As a reply to Nolan's comment, one of the teachers explains that the reason for their silence or hesitation is that they haven't got that far in their planning. Nolan pauses for a moment, as if to reflect on how to move forward, and continues: "but how does your chosen theme correlate with the way you evaluate?" She poses this question a bit sternly. The two teachers again seem somewhat hesitant and doubtful. There is a short silence. Nolan starts tapping at the computer in front of her. The tapping becomes very apparent in the silence, which seem to make Laura jump in and attempt to 'modify' Nolan's question. Once again, she comments: "well, well, it's only to get you guys thinking". She seems bothered by the situation. There is a lot of 'stuff' filling the room; Nolan's way of phrasing questions, the silence and tapping of computer keys. The teachers slowly start to come up with some ideas about how to move forward and Laura starts telling them about her experience when doing something similar in 8th grade and what literature she read with the children. All of a sudden, the feedback session seems to change in 'nature' and seems more like a team meeting where colleagues share knowledge. (Fieldnotes, 26.10.2018)

The above excerpt from the fieldnotes contains multimodalities, such as affect, sounds (i.e., tapping), technology and Laura's weekly log writings consisting of words and photos, as well as informal talks with Laura. It contributes to manifesting her positioning in the vignette in the form of a (re)configuration that is a 'balancing act' ; "sometimes it can be a balancing act to figure out when to take the position of an expert, colleague, co-practitioner or something else" (vignette, Laura: "Co-practitioner, expert or both?").

(Re)configuring the headteachers' positioning as a balancing act is partly made possible by acknowledging the subtle interplay and dynamics between Laura and her fellow headteacher in the concrete observational setting (see above observation excerpt) and noticing the 'good cop/bad cop' positioning between them, but it is also made possible by being sensitive to the various multimodalities that are part of constituting this 'balancing act'. For example, the sound of Nolan tapping on the computer, her tone of voice and the subsequent silence are all agencies that come to mean and matter through the ways in which they intra-act and in doing so materialize a certain bad-cop positioning. This comes to compete with another positioning that is materializing as Laura attempts to 'soften' their expertness and Nolan's behaviour. By referencing the literature that she, as a teacher, has read with students, thereby materializing books and her colleague-ness as subtle, but useful agencies, a counter-positioning to the bad cop manifests.

Aside from being 'made up' from fieldnotes of the referenced observation, the vignette and the above (re)configuration are also constructed on the basis of data

produced during an informal talk with Laura about how to develop professional learning amongst her colleagues without exuding a sense of superiority. And, lastly, the vignette included photos that Laura provided during the interviews and in her log writings, depicting such things as a pile of books that she had been reading in order to enhance her knowledge of a specific subject relating to her practice as a headteacher. Photos that materialize a discursive construction of 'expertness' and 'knowing your stuff' intra-acting a different positioning related to equality and being at eye-level with one's colleagues.

In the above, the intra-actions that make up the (re)configuration in question consist of multimodalities such as concrete sayings, doings and artefacts (e.g. books), but 'matter' beyond practices, discourses and materialities is also embraced, since the (re)configuration is also made up of the researcher's cutting together-apart of the symbolic value relating to aspects such as the photo of the books from Laura's weekly log. The elucidated intra-activity thus helps the becoming of the sometimes-contradictory positioning struggles and negotiations characterizing the current (re)configuration.

When including the vignette in the interview with Laura, we sensitized the interview towards multiple multimodalities – the vignette, the interview bodies, the interview conversations, the room, the table, the photos – thereby enabling a focus on the emerging intra-activity. This retooling thus engages with already existing discursive-material relations, by which it cuts together-apart the data production of a certain (re)configuration of the teacher positioning. Also, retooling the interview to include a vignette produces yet another (re)configuration of Laura's positioning: the one that is created in the agential cut in the interview setting by introducing the vignette as an agency that is taking part in shaping her future positioning. For example, during the interview, when the (vignette) cut and the (re)configuration of her positioning struggles is presented, Laura contemplates out loud whether her attempts to position herself as someone who makes mistakes and is always at eye-level with her mentees might make her almost 'invisible', or un-impactful, which is the exact opposite of what she is supposed to be:

> [listening to this] makes me reflect on whether I sufficiently step into character. What's most important? Is the most important part that I'm a headteacher, or is the most important part that I stimulate good relationships? (Interview with Laura, 09.11.2018)

When retooling interviews via vignette writings, we are granted insight into the intra-actions that transform, process and (re)configure the becoming of this positioning. Such a retooling should therefore not be seen as a way to represent something static, but more as a situated construction of what is at stake locally across practices, space and time.

5.5.6. RETOOLING OBSERVATIONS FOR MULTIMODALITY

In the following, a multimodal mapping produced via on-the-go shadowing of a headteacher, Linda, is unfolded in order to demonstrate how the sometimes subtle, sometimes tangible multimodalities pop up, intra-act and hence become agentic and constitutive within a specific situation. All pieces of data relate to the same theme of positioning negotiations and struggles, as highlighted in the previous section.

Shadowing Linda throughout a workday provided an opportunity to observe different aspects of her enacting her positioning, relating to being a teacher, being a teacher-with-extra-responsibilities and the transition spheres between the two. By conducting observations that took inspiration from shadowing and the mobility that this technique offers, we produced data that is particularly sensitive to everyday practices. Retooling our observations through multimodal mapping means that subtle or 'soft' aspects relating to Linda's transitions in and out of different positionings are included – again, in a cut together-apart account that acts as an agentic multimodality in itself within the data production. The mapping therefore takes part in (exploring as well as) intra-acting her positioning. In the example below, we focus on these transitions and the many 'swaps' that she has to perform throughout a day, which often take place in a split second; sometimes between different contexts or on her way somewhere. This requires sensitivity towards the multimodalities that come to mean and matter in the specific situations, creating a certain 'cut' or temporary feature (a reconfiguration) of this new positioning. For example, a potential change in body language, 'props' that are used to convey the swap, particular vocabularies, visible unease etc. are all potential multimodalities that (re)configure the positioning that Linda embodies.

By shadowing Linda on her way to a meeting with a colleague, whose class instruction she had observed, and by mapping the various multimodalities while tagging along, we were able to follow how her positioning materializes as an 'organizational-other' (i.e., a headteacher), producing an insight into some of the swapping mechanisms related to this positioning. Via this sensitivity towards multimodality, including space, it becomes clear that the short walk from the teachers' lounge – where the two are mere colleagues – to the conference room – where Linda becomes a headteacher – produces a particular space that seems instrumental in the process of transitioning from a teacher to a headteacher. This short walk becomes a form of meaningful context for the transition, which lacks a concrete physical manifestation (i.e., it is not a room with a specific purpose, such as a teachers' lounge, classroom, conference room etc.), yet it is a 'room' where Linda's positioning slowly manifests itself. For example, via the initial jovial topic of conversation, the later absence of conversation, the reference to a past time-space (expert) intervention led by Linda, the walking-space from the teacher's lounge to the meeting room etc.:

> I arrive for the meeting at the school, and Linda picks me up in front of
> the teachers' lounge. We walk together towards the meeting room along

with one of the participants in the meeting (Linda's colleague); Linda has some materials (books) under her arm. They talk about this and that, private stuff, and they laugh a lot. They seem to be good friends, or at least to know each other well. I know the meeting room we are heading towards and I notice that, as we get closer, the chatting stops. I wonder why. After a brief silence, Linda makes reference to the books under her arm, saying: "I brought these". Her tone of voice and language-use changes markedly. She asks if her intervention in the colleague's classroom two weeks ago had had any effects. There is now a certain formality to her voice, and her choice of words is different. (Excerpt from fieldnotes: 09.26.2018)

This excerpt elucidates a (re)configuration of her positioning regarding swapping and is facilitated by the multimodal agencies that come to mean and matter in the short walk from the teachers' lounge to the meeting room. Specifically, the shift in Linda's tone of voice, her language-use, the concrete change in the topic of conversation, the silence, the materials under her arm, the reference to an earlier time-space (expert) intervention and the walking-space are all agencies that materialize Linda's transition and positioning.

Our efforts at retooling our observations allow us to temporally co-produce a glimpse of the intra-activity, which makes it possible for us to attend to the (re)configurations that are constitutive of this emerging positioning. Thus, we argue that, by retooling our methods for multimodality, we can produce fuller insight into the constituents of Linda's becoming and help the further analysis of how discourse-materiality entanglement intra-acts with this informal middle-management positioning, and with what effects.

5.5.7. DISCUSSING THE POTENTIALS AND CHALLENGES OF MULTIMODALITY

In this paper, we have addressed the lack of explicit methodological debates that restrain us from more critically and creatively sharing, evaluating, building upon and developing new methodological designs and empirical research practices – including the emerging challenges and advancements. This implies, for example, that we are not able to share strategies on how to practically engage with producing and managing entangled, multimodal data, or articulate new quality criteria and research performances when embedded and intra-acting with the empirical field. In response, we have proposed a framework for retooling methods for multimodality as a way to sensitize research practices for a relational approach when doing fieldwork. This involves an embedded and embodied researcher practice that acknowledges the performativity of multiple modalities in empirical encounters, facilitating the researcher to approach the discursive-material (re)configurations of meaning and matter that co-constitute an organizational phenomenon.

As such, our framework is an invitation to embrace the relationality of discourse-materiality empirically, and corresponds to the 'discourse *as* materiality' approach – an approach identified as immediate, yet extremely difficult to achieve at a practical and pragmatic level (Phillips & Oswick, 2012). Although the conceptual debates repeatedly mention or refer to the need for method innovations in order to address the practical and pragmatic level (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Hardy & Grant, 2012; Kuhn & Putnam, 2014), the vast majority of studies remain at an abstract, analytical-conceptual level, not addressing how to actually practise relationality when, for example, developing one's interview guide, structuring fieldnotes or conducting video observation. Instead of remaining in the abstract, this article attempts to stay close to the basic craft of the researcher – data production – and develop an applied methodology. This, we have argued, implies a researcher practice that maintains simultaneous foci: 1) sensitivity towards the intra-actions of multimodal data sources such as language-in-use, visuals, technology, affects etc.; 2) a way of approaching the relationality of discourse-materiality, i.e. by registering, mapping, asking questions, illustrating, placing oneself during observations etc.; 3) an ethical aspect concerning what has been marginalized or *cui bono* – who stands to gain (Barad, 2007).

Our framework is therefore more than a praising of method-mixing and employing multiple data sources (Philips & Oswick, 2012) – cf. first focus. Also, retooling is an approach that allows us to test and experiment with different 'versions' or (re)configurations of data production, including in the field moment. That is, the researcher can choose to move around during observations, to shift between sitting or standing, to intra-act with local worldings (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2016) and hence to track different entangling multimodalities depending on her positioning in the room. Or, an occurrence while making observations could prompt more than one type of mapping; such as one that includes illustrations or tracings of the intra-action with, for example, a poster on the wall that becomes part of a meeting – cf. second focus. This also meets the ethical aspects of research practice – relating to the third focus, since it is the agentic cuts and (re)configurations that are not always considered central, given voice or even noticed, which are in focus here.

Our framework thus offers an applied method-retooling that supports and expands theoretical debates about the relationality of discourse-materiality (Hardy & Thomas, 2015; Mumby, 2011) and empirically echoes the suggestion that relational agency is about the constant renegotiation of communicatively organized possibilities (Ashcraft *et al*., 2009). This aligns with the turn to materiality in organizational discourse studies – and, in particular, with CCO arguments that we should also study how things make things do things (Bencherki, 2016). In adding to this, our retooling provides a way of continuously renegotiating what meanings and matters are performative within the data produced; for example, by making visible various agential cuts from across multiple modes of data, and from unfolding different (re-)configurations by developing more than one multimodal mapping for observations.

Furthermore, exploring the relationality of discourse-materiality within an empirically embedded organizational realm by retooling – e.g. multimodal mapping as retooled observations – may help to produce data and provide insights for exploring the conceptual and analytical move away from *a priori* micro-macro divisions (Cooren & Fairhurst, 2009; Hardy, 2004; Kuhn, 2012). This is because the retooling framework – as we have argued here – does not base the method design on any presumed organizational orders, levels or forms, but follows what is emerging through the relationality of discourse-materiality within and across situated times and spaces. Thus, retooling methods for multimodality can also support an applied challenge to linear time discourse as a fundamental assumption in empirical studies, data analysis and theorizing often debated within CMS of organizational discourse, CCO and process views (Hernes *et al.*, 2013; Langley *et al.*, 2013; Sabelis *et al.*, 2005; Vasquez & Cooren, 2013).

In this regard, this article adds both a framework for retooling methods for multimodality and specific empirical examples of methods that centre research practices around the relationality of discourse-materiality. In doing so, it may help empirical studies to move beyond micro/macro divides, as well as across linear, chronological time(s).

However, these potential uses may also become misuses. One such misunderstood use of retooling methods could involve data production focused on already defined discursive storylines or materializations, predefined by the researcher, a series of selective agential cuts and (re)configurations of data to support existing understandings or arguments. This would be a careless violation of the ethics of new materialist onto-epistemology upon which this framework rests.

Retooling, as we have suggested, involves an onto-epistemology with responsibility and accountability for the relationalities that 'we' intra-act, help perform and elucidate by our research accounts (Barad, 2008, p. 333). This is also stressed by Barad: "Ethics is about accounting for our part of the entangled webs we weave" (2008, p. 335). With these words, we are reminded that our cuts are in fact a part of the mattering process itself. They do not represent what is already there, independent of the researcher's gaze and something that can be discovered; instead, our cuts are in themselves a process whereby difference is explicated and comes to matter (Davies, 2014, p. 734) – as shown in our examples, when we cut together-apart data in, for example, the vignette writing.

Although ethical concerns are part of every research practice, they also challenge us not to return to human-centring reflexivity as the privileged position, and further demand that we develop new modes and vocabularies for visualizing, describing or otherwise accounting for our empirical practices, analytical steps, findings etc. – as our current academic lingo still remains powerful and performs representationalism (Amrouche *et al.,* 2018; Brewis & Williams, 2018; Vachhani, 2018). As we lack

vocabulary, doing it differently (by retooling) may aid a re-, or disorganization, of our own work and registrations of such in our data production and writing through such actions as producing new participative embodiments, vocabularies and apparatuses for conducting and writing up empirical accounts (Langley *et al*., 2013). Thus, a central challenge to deal with is to push our own (re/dis)organization of scholarly accounting and language around this even further – and the inspiration from new materialism may carry the potential to accommodate exactly this.

By advancing explicit method debates and offering a framework for retooling methods for multimodality inspired by new materialism within CMS, this article calls for more explicit scholarly engagement with method explorations. We hope that it will also lead to renewed discussions about the ethical implications of our efforts in future research, including our use of scholarly language, when we as researchers try to understand our role in breathing life into new possibilities; that is, it will help to constitute new social realities. Moreover, we also hope that these discussions will stimulate future debates about how we can develop our methods further along these lines, and perhaps thereby challenge the conceptual advancements too.

5.5.8. CONCLUSION

In this article, we have unfolded how a relational perspective on organizations and organizing, with inspiration from new materialist thinking, and specifically the work of Karen Barad, has facilitated the development of what we call a framework for retooling methods for multimodality. This is a framework that we have developed in order to stimulate and engage in the methodological explorations of the relationality of discourse-materiality. This framework has enabled us to retool our methods and helps us, we argue, to approach the discourse-materiality relations that make up organizational constructions.

To illustrate the potential of this, we unfold two exemplary method developments that are significant in relation to the emergence of a new middle-management positioning within education in Denmark; retooling both exploratory interviews and observations with the ambition of showing how to retool one's methods to multimodality in, respectively, *in-vivo* settings (observation) and *in-vitro* environments (exploratory interviews). Thus, we also emphasize that it is not only in naturally occurring contexts that we can explore processes of relational becoming, but also in researcher-initiated ones. We advance the concept of retooling as a way of cultivating an embedded and embodied researcher practice and approach. The implied research practice involves an embedding that attunes researchers towards becoming connections between specific embodied multimodalities; that is, an embedding that turns towards what happens when multimodalities intra-act, become agentic, and come to matter. Also, it involves a research practice that becomes in already existing discursive-material relations and intra-acts with local worldings. In our framework, we elaborate the concept of multimodality as a way to push the data production to become sensitive to

intra-active agencies, and our approach is thus an abandonment of a strictly mono-modal discursive or material focus. Where Barad's theorizing offers a conceptual framework for conceiving the constitutive dynamics of relational becoming, the concept of multimodality helps us to facilitate an embedded and embodied research practice that acknowledges precisely these constitutive dynamics.

In conclusion, we suggest that retooling can be applied to various methods when researchers are interested in the relationality of discourse-materiality. This multiuse allows for flexibility and creativity when designing one's study, which is valuable because it can help to develop a responsivity to emerging local issues and provide richer, more complex data leading to more nuanced insights into our social realities. Inherently, then, our efforts push an agenda that is conducive to the development of interdisciplinary, creative and multi-modal explorations within the broader field of CMS.

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5.5.9. REFERENCES

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CHAPTER 6. ANALYSES

6.1. ARTICLE TWO

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Title: Advancing a Baradian perspective on the field of identity work: An empirical analysis of the complex discourse-materiality identity construction

Abstract

Conceptualizing identity in processual terms as identity work has long been acknowledged within the broad field of critical management and organization studies. However, recent studies show that the process by which identities evolve is still under-explored. Although extant research has considered how discourse and other symbolic means play a part in this process, this article expands such perspectives by foregrounding the relationality of discourse-materiality in identity construction processes. Using the example of an empirical analysis taken from a case study within education in Denmark, the author examines the process of identity construction by considering the ways in which discourse-materiality works to perform identities. The author combines insights from new materialist thinking with organizational discourse studies in the development of an analytics to approach the process of identity construction – coined as identity intra-activity. In doing so, the article demonstrates how an informal middle-management positioning of selected teachers is performed within its organization. By advancing the notion of identity intra-activity, the findings enable an understanding of identity work as materialized by multiple discursive-material and embodied resources – all enacted in/through the teachers' practices – creating a petri dish for examining the co-constitutive role of discourse-materiality and enabling new ways of thinking about identity work.

Keywords: Identity work, discourse, materiality, co-constitution/relationality, new materialism/Karen Barad

6.1.1. INTRODUCTION

Identity has long been a core construct for understanding a range of phenomena in the broad field of critical management and organization studies. Despite various definitions and developments, a pivotal turn towards conceptualizing identity in processual terms as identity work and struggle has been increasingly acknowledged (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Snow & Anderson, 1987; Svenningson & Alvesson, 2003). This particular conceptualization discusses whether identity is to be treated as a fixed essence or rather as a "temporary, context-sensitive and evolving set of constructions" (Alvesson *et al.*, 2008, p. 6), thereby arguing for a fluid and 'non-fixed' understanding of the process of identity construction. Thus, identity is not only an inner state, but also always a political and negotiated practice subsumed into the regulatory dynamics of societal structures and discourses (Muhr *et al.*, 2019).

Although it is more than a decade since calls for a better understanding of the dynamics of identity work were voiced (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002), recent studies show that, in fact, the concept of identity work is still under-surveyed (Brown, 2015). This includes research on the process by which identities are constructed and come to be. Such research concerns explorations of the particular 'ingredients' or resources (e.g. discourse and other symbolic means) out of which identities can be said to be crafted (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004; Altheide, 2000; Halford & Leonard, 2006). Indeed, the need for such explorations has been recognized in the literature (Alvesson *et al.*, 2008), and while scholars have provided important insights regarding the relationship between identity construction and multiple human/non-human agencies (e.g., Ainsworth, Grant, & Iedema, 2009; Bergström & Knights, 2006; Plotnikof, 2016; Thomas & Davies, 2005), in this article, I propose to push this type of inquiry even further. In doing so, I consider discourse and materiality to be identity-ingredients/resources, constituted through each other, and thus transcending entity perspectives of discourse and materiality as ontologically separable elements (Hultin & Introna, 2019). This means that the relationship between multiple discursive-material and embodied resources is foregrounded and, specifically, I attend to the resources that can be said to produce, or perform, identity work.

Following this claim, I ask: *how can we understand the process of identity construction by considering the ways in which multiple resources produce identity work?* In order to enable an analysis that is sensitive to the multiple resources that partake in the construction of identities, the work of new materialist theorist, Karen Barad, becomes a promising source of inspiration (Barad, 2003, 2007, 2011). In her seminal article (2003) on posthuman performativity, Barad redirects the focus from language as the main point of interest towards the discourse-materiality relationship. This perspective has become increasingly recognized within critical management and organizational discourse studies (Dille & Plotnikof, 2020; Iedema, 2007; Hardy & Thomas, 2015; Kuhn *et al.*, 2017; Putnam, 2015) and furthermore has stimulated a co-constitutive perspective on discourse-materiality, arguing a relational frame

through which to investigate a wide array of phenomena (Hughes *et al*., 2017; Kuhn *et al.*, 2017; Scott & Orlikowski, 2015).

In this article, I examine the complex constitutive dynamics of identity work by introducing a perspective of discourse-materiality with inspiration from Barad (2003) and organizational discourse studies (Iedema, 2007; Kuhn *et al.*, 2017). I specifically utilize Barad's concept of intra-activity (Barad, 2003) as a form of analytics and introduce the notion of 'identity intra-activity' as a way to explore how the relationship of discourse-materiality performs identity work. The proposed analytics has been developed for a case study of a new informal middle-management position recently given to chosen teachers as an effect of the latest school reform in Denmark, and the article's findings provide an empirically based account of the performativity of discourse-materiality in identity work. As the analysis will illustrate, this performative view is central, because it allows us to see what would otherwise potentially go unnoticed. Namely, that identity construction processes are subsumed and governed within a range of discursive, material and embodied resources and practices that have local effects and that shape, or condition, the identity work. In terms of the current case study, this relates to simultaneously becoming (or being) a teacher and an informal middle manager. Thus, by offering an analytical conceptualization on the basis of new materialist thinking and organizational discourse studies, the article creates a petri dish for examining the co-constitutive role of discourse-materiality and thus enables new ways of thinking about identity work.

This article, then, specifically seeks to contribute to processual and performative perspectives within identity scholarship (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Harding *et al.,* 2017; Hultin & Introna, 2019) and furthermore responds to invitations (Alvesson *et al.*, 2008) to push a research agenda on the co-constitutive 'play' between the diverse discursive-material resources in identity work. I commence by reviewing the literature on identity work within critical management and organization studies, touching only briefly on the various influences on conceptualizing identity, and connect this literature to perspectives on discourse-materiality relationship. Against this background, I then develop the proposed analytical conceptualization with inspiration from new materialist thinking and organizational discourse studies, and illustrate and discuss its operationalization in relation to a case study of an informal middle-management position within education. In the article's findings, I present an empirical analysis of how discourse-materiality works to perform identities, thereby offering insights into the construction processes of identity work. Finally, I discuss how identity intra-activity can contribute to advancing our understandings of identity work, including the implications of allowing such a conceptualization to guide future research practice.

6.1.2. STUDIES OF IDENTITY WORK

Identity has long been used as a term across the broad field of critical management and organization studies to understand the complex relationship between self, work and processes of organizing (Alvesson *et al.*, 2008; Brown, 2001, 2015; Ybema *et al.*, 2009b). In one of the key texts mapping the field of identity scholarship, identity is characterized as a popular frame through which to investigate multiple phenomena and something that seems to "be linked to nearly everything: from merges, motivation and meaning-making to ethnicity, entrepreneurship and emotions to politics, participation and project teams" (Alvesson *et al.*, 2008, p. 5). Naturally, this manifold use has prompted a variety of influences conceptualizing identity, which also reflect different theoretical orientations. One such theoretical differentiation in the literature relates to distinctive versus fluid understandings of identity. The former emphasizes assumptions about stable identities and inherent core characteristics (Albert & Whetten, 1985), whereas the latter builds on assumptions that treat identity "as a temporary, context-sensitive and evolving set of constructions" (Alvesson *et al.*, 2008, p. 6). The term 'identity work' was coined (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) to capture the complexity of this latter fluid and dynamic understanding. It implies an interest in the process of identity construction and the agency that actors employ when conducting their identity work (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Svenningson & Alvesson, 2003).

Although the concept of identity work offers a form of demarcation in identity scholarship, there is still great variety within this (sub)field, resulting in a body of literature that is rich in its diversity of approaches, foci and theorizations (Brown, 2015, p. 24). One theorization, which is of primary interest to this article, focuses on processes of becoming (Watson, 2008) and sees identities as being continuously crafted. From this perspective, there is no fixed identity, but only identi*ties*, in ongoing construction through discourse (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004; Ainsworth *et al.*, 2009; Altheide, 2000; Bergström & Knights, 2006; Halford & Leonard, 2006; Webb, 2006). This perspective rests on assumptions that see stability as merely momentary (Brown, 2015, p. 27) and identities as always negotiated and contested (Alvesson, 2010; Alvesson *et al.*, 2008). Despite a multitude of studies practising under the banner of 'identity work' – implying an interest in identity on processual terms across theorizations – there continues to be little research exploring "the process by which identity evolves..." (Ibarra, 1999, p. 765). This is echoed by Alvesson *et al.* (2008), who point to areas of development relating to identity work in the context of organizational life, and call for future research that directs attention towards the 'what', i.e. the resources or ingredients out of which identities are crafted and come to be (Alvesson *et al.*, 2008, p. 18). This call addresses the need for research exploring different conceptualizations of agency; for example, related to how discursive and material realities take part in producing identities.

In this article, I pick up on this invitation to further explore how the different resources at play contribute to the construction of identit*ies*. In this way, I aim to propose a conceptualization that goes beyond the ways in which different discursive elements influence processes of identity construction (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004) and echo extant literature that enables a performative perspective on discourse and materiality (Bergström & Knights, 2006; Harding *et al.*, 2017; Hultin & Introna, 2019), and thus a more fluid understanding of agency, to the study of identity work. In doing so, I also draw upon insights from the field of organizational discourse studies (this will be described in the following section), and the analysis will demonstrate how discourse-materiality relationships are made present and agentic and elucidate the performativity, or materialization, of identit*ies*.

Connecting studies of identity work to literature on discourse-materiality relationship

Throughout the past 30 years, an increasing focus on the constitutive processes that produce organizational realities has developed within the broad field of critical management studies, and particularly within organizational discourse studies – abandoning the perception of organizations as *a priori* entities of existence. This development was triggered to a large degree by the so-called 'linguistic turn', focusing on how language, rather than reflecting social reality, in fact produces it (Rorty, 1967). This turn, and the inherent insights into the significance of language's constituting role, has arguably contributed to an interest in discourse, especially amongst scholars concerned with discourse and communication (Cooren *et al.*, 2011; Kuhn & Putnam, 2014; Phillips & Oswick, 2012; Schoeneborn *et al.*, 2014).

Recent years, though, have been characterized by intense debates about whether an over-emphasis on discourse in a language-restricted sense has led to a disregard of materiality. Specifically, these discussions concern the degree to which discourse and materiality should be viewed as a classic dualism or rather as entangled and co-constitutive features of everyday organizational life (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011; Iedema 2007; Kuhn *et al.,* 2017; Martine & Cooren 2016; Philips & Oswick 2012; Putnam 2015). Indeed, these discussions regarding both the conceptualization of discourse and materiality and the relationship between the two have produced productive theoretical advancements (Iedema, 2011; Mumby, 2011), resulting in alternative views on the 'status' of discourse and materiality and their relationship (Hardy & Thomas, 2015; Iedema, 2011; Kuhn *et al.,* 2017; Putnam, 2015; Scott & Orlikowski, 2015).

In particular, these views propose an entirely different perspective on materiality, centring on meaning, and specifically on *how* materiality acquires meaning and comes to matter through its entanglement with discourse. In effect, therefore, materiality is not disregarded from this perspective, neither is it merely a physical 'thing' or distinct object; rather it becomes meaningful, and becomes 'something', because it is constructed through a complex intersection of discourses, practices, power relations

etc. (Mumby, 2011). As a consequence, under these assumptions, dualistic views of discourse and materiality are challenged and transcended when organizing processes, such as processes of identity construction, are viewed as relational (Kuhn *et al.*, 2017). This understanding of relationality draws upon notions of discourse and materiality suggested by Barad (2003, 2007), who proposes that they only 'exist' when joined together, that is, when entangled – and come into being as a result of their intra-action:

> The relationship between the material and the discursive is one of mutual entailment. Neither is articulated/articulable in the absence of the other; matter and meaning are mutually articulated. Neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically or epistemologically prior. Neither can be explained in terms of the other. Neither has privileged status in determining the other. (Barad, 2003, p. 822)

As a response to the above developments, increasing analytical efforts have been directed towards investigating how this relationality and intra-activity play out in processes of organizing (e.g. Iedema, 2007; Kuhn *et al.*, 2017). However, this focus on relational becoming, or constitutive entanglement, seem for the most part to have bypassed the field of identity work (for exceptions see Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Hultin & Introna, 2019), leaving room for further explorations of the ways in which the relationality of discourse and materiality influence the precarious, in-flux and ever-evolving processes of identity construction. In particular, the 'ingredients' or the discursive-material resources out of which these identities are in fact crafted, i.e. performed, are yet to be better understood.

In this article, I argue that, if we are to move the research on identity work forward, we need to develop analytics that in fact embrace entanglement in the process of identity construction. That is, analytics that think across discursive-material resources, and see the mutual entanglement that is in fact performative and thus facilitating of the process of transformation and becoming. This involves a re-direction of our analytical focus, from the human subject as being at the centre of identity construction processes to embracing the multiple agencies that intertwine and take part in this process – the human subject being one agency amongst many non-human ones.

6.1.3. IDENTITY INTRA-ACTIVITY: APPROACHING DISCOURSE-MATERIALITY IN THE PROCESS OF IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Taking particular inspiration from Barad (2003, 2007, 2013), I propose the notion of identity intra-activity as a form of analytics and a way to explore discourse-materiality entanglement relating to the identity work of informal middle managers within education. Identity intra-activity becomes an analytical conceptualization of the construction process and demonstrates how the identity work of the teachers enacting this position emerges through the relationality of discourse-materiality. In other

words, identity intra-activity demonstrates how the entanglement of multiple discursive-material resources performs particular identities, shedding light on our understanding of the complex relationship between self, work and organizing/organization.

Barad's perspective on the relationality of discourse and materiality is founded upon agential realism (Barad, 2003), a theorizing that is often subsumed under the label 'new materialism'. With clear reference to a Foucauldian notion of discourse, Barad's (2003) conceptualization centres on the proposal that discourse can never be seen as an isolated entity existing separately from materiality. That is, discourse cannot exist without being materialized; instead, it only exists due to its relation to the material and vice versa. As a consequence: "Neither can be explained in terms of the other. Neither has a privileged status in determining the other" (Barad, 2003, p. 822).

Thus, a key concept, and the premise of becoming in Barad's universe, is entanglement (Barad, 2003, p. 818). This concept highlights the relationality of 'things', or resources, such as discourse, materiality, body, time, space etc., and Barad views these as 'forces' that, when entangled, become co-constituting of phenomena. Entanglement is thus not simply to be intertwined, it is to lack an independent existence and is facilitated by what Barad coins as 'intra-activity' (Barad, 2007, p. 30) – an essential play-on-words contrasting with the usual '*inter*action': "which presumes the prior existence of independent entities/relata" (Barad, 2003, p. 815). This suggests that discourse and materiality emerge – as 'matter that comes to matter' – from/through their intra-action. As such, Barad's thinking demonstrates that the becoming of phenomena is in fact a mattering process (Barad, 2003). Indeed, this is where Barad's development of Foucault becomes clear, because the concept of intra-action pays further attention to *how* the discursive-material resources are 'bound together' and made possible in/through practice. By implication, practices are therefore considered ontological (Scott & Orlikowski, 2015, p. 698) and involve ongoing, local and material (re)configurations that are features of the phenomenon at hand. As such, the term (re)configuration (Barad, 2003) articulates an understanding of phenomena as ongoing/fluid, without clear beginnings or endings. Clearly, (re)configurations are therefore not just radical and well-defined changes, comparable to a change from one distinct identity to another, but rather they materialize in multiple practices as specific features and nuances of a phenomenon, and are: "...traces of what might yet (have) happen(ed)" (Barad, 2014, p. 168). In this sense, a phenomenon, such as in this case the identity work of middle managers, is dynamically produced-in-practice via an ongoing intra-activity and is hence: "... – not a thing, but a doing" (Barad, 2007, p. 151).

With reference to the above, Barad's framework is therefore a thinking that centres on how discourse-materiality comes to matter through intra-activity. This will, as I will show, allow me to approach discursive-material intra-actions as agencies that perform identit*ies*. By foregrounding intra-activity as the fulcrum of the mattering

process, 'relations' become the crux from which everything evolves – they are: "...a buzzing hive of activity – an 'assemblage' of ongoing performances and enactments" (Kuhn *et al.,* 2017, p. 32). This means that organizational phenomena, such as identit*ies*, only exist within particular discursive-material relations and are constantly performed, that is (re)enacted, and thus ever-unfolding, emerging, contingent and precarious. This is an activity, then, that incorporates multiple resources; material and discursive, social and scientific, human and nonhuman, and natural and cultural (Barad, 2003, p. 808). Clearly then, these assumptions do not privilege any one resource in the production of phenomena, but see all resources as potential sources of agency when intra-acting. Agency can therefore not be located with any particular resource; rather, it is determined in the specific mattering process and flows continuously through practices that then constitute certain conditions of possibility (Juelskjær, 2016, p. 757) under which the enactment of, for example, identity work materializes.

At the analytical level, focusing on intra-activity will illustrate what Barad calls an agential cut (Barad, 2003, p. 815); that is, situated 'versions' of the world, involving specific material (re)configurations. It is via this agential cut that the emerging and precarious properties and boundaries of, for example, a seemingly stabilized identity materialize (come to matter) and hence allow us to gain insight into the becoming of this identity. In relation to the analytics I propose, this means that different intra-actions produce ongoing (re)configurations of the identity work in question. For this process, I coin the term 'identity intra-activity'. The analytics, then, aligns with an understanding of identity not in entity terms, but rather as performative discourse-materiality 'multi-ties' or emerging identity transformations. Identity intra-activity therefore helps the analysis to focus on the different resources of intra-acting identit*ies* and thus helps to explain specific construction processes involved in the mattering processes of identity work. These include elucidating how particular relations materialize different identity (re)configurations, which, as the analysis will show, produce certain conditions of possibility for the teachers in question when enacting their position.

In this section, I have described the theoretical foundations upon which the proposed analytics, identity intra-activity, rest. To sum up, the aim of this analytics is to contribute with an analytical conceptualization of identity construction processes. In effect, the analytics offers a way of thinking about the mattering process (i.e. process of becoming) by enabling the intra-activity that performs particular identities. In what follows, I will demonstrate this by presenting an empirical analysis of performing identities.

6.1.4. SETTING THE SCENE: CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

Throughout the past decade, selected teachers within primary and secondary public education in Denmark have been given increasing organizational responsibility, with

the broad purpose of helping to organize local expertise and achieve school improvements. The primary task of the teachers concerned is still classroom teaching, and most of their working hours are spent in this activity. The new responsibilities are therefore a form of addition to their professional work as teachers. In effect, this means that the selected teachers are given the (extra) responsibility of strengthening and stimulating certain educational and pedagogical initiatives within the school and amongst their colleagues. Examples include promoting methods of classroom management or cultivating professional development via collegial supervision, coaching and mentoring. Since the latest Danish school reform of 2013 (UVM, 2013), these teachers have also become central to supporting and implementing educational initiatives relating to this reform. Undeniably, this development changes the traditional professional identity work of a teacher, as the teachers in question are positioned in new ways with varied degrees of informal and shared leadership responsibilities, prompting novel identity issues relating to this expanded professional identity work and collegiate social dynamics.

The research upon which the present article is based took place during the autumn of 2018 over the course of five months and was designed as a multi-site and multi-method piece of fieldwork. It aimed to follow the continual discursive-material unfolding and local enactments of this informal positioning, including issues relating to identity work. The fieldwork was inspired by ethnographic approaches within organization studies (Cunliffe, 2009; Czarniawska, 2007; Ybema *et al*., 2009a) and aimed to produce 'thick descriptions' of micro interactions in the field: "...captured through a blend of methods" (Cunliffe, 2009, p. 231), including field notes, attending meetings and informal gatherings, participant log writings, vignette writings, participant observation and exploratory interviews.

Due to the study's discursive-material perspective on the identity work of these teachers, I wanted to trace the performative flow of the daily enactment across actors, practices, time(s) and spaces. Also, considering the informality of this new position, requiring the teachers to enact 'ad hoc', that is, in passing, during lunch breaks, while teaching etc. it became pertinent to develop methods that were sensitive to precisely this cross-cutting enactment. Hence, the ethnography was not focused on one organizational site or carried out in one particular context, a pre-discursive entity to enter and uncover. Rather, it was designed as an ethnography that would elucidate the complex discursive-material identity constructions as they played out across several 'spheres' and actors. The primary participants in this fieldwork were five teachers enacting the position in question, and secondary participants were teacher colleagues and school management, the latter primarily participating in interview settings. All the participants were chosen because they were staff members with direct involvement in the daily flow of this position.

The observational fieldwork involved tagging along in as many different naturally occurring contexts as possible (in meetings, at lunch, between classes etc.) and

furthermore engaging in brief conversations with the field participants when needed. This meant, for example, asking questions regarding certain events, understandings etc. and from time to time presenting early analyses to the participants in order to discuss the material and make room for them to comment on it, thus allowing the participants to reconstruct meaning and thereby nuance the constructions. Field note 'jottings' were produced on the spot in a notebook or on the computer, depending on the context. Full notes were written up at the end of each day, and subsequently immediate themes (distinguishing between local 'codes' and analytical 'codes') within and across the data were entered into an electronical empirical log alongside 'superficial' registrations of 'when, where, who and what'.

Weekly participant log writings were produced by the five key teachers, including both text and images. The logs provided a continuous insight into the identity work being performed during the everyday professional life of these teachers, as they were encouraged to write up the, sometimes trivial, day-to-day minutiae of their practices of encounters, conversations, events, tasks and their reflections thereon – using words and images.

Lastly, the fieldwork resulted in exploratory interviews and focus groups that were conducted with all of the field participants, both in 'formal' interview settings and in situ – in the school yard, in the coffee or lunchroom, in hallways etc. Both formal and informal 'set-ups' covered key themes relating to this new position and the inherent identity work, including enactments of everyday practices, work history, good/bad experiences of enacting this position, dilemmas, etc. The 'formal' interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the in-situ interviews were recreated from memory and written up during breaks or later the same day.

The produced data set was subsequently 'equated' in the sense that all data were subject to detailed thematic analysis inspired by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Hughes *et al.* (2017), using qualitative analysis software (NVivo). This involved a theoretically inspired coding, whereby the analysis is driven by research questions and the process of focusing the data thus simulates a form of Q&A, in which the data 'answers back' in relation to the research interest and questions. In relation to the current study, I asked: *What local 'matter' seems to matter in the identity construction when enacting this position?* That is, what materialized/what mattered in the specific enactment and what possible discursive-material and embodied resources were at play? This questioning created a form of analytical direction and a categorization of the data (observation data, log writings and interview data) by producing a set of 'bounded' empirical material. This initially involved coding interesting features associated with the question posed and subsequently organizing these codes into major categories representing local (re)configurations/features of their identity construction. These categories were then broken down into intra-acting concepts that consisted of collated discursive-material data about practices, or enactments, that were relevant to each category, hence elucidating a form of lived, embodied and relational

becoming. For example, as I will later explain, concepts such as, 'claiming space(s)', 'juxtapositioning of time(s)', performing availability and tropes-in-use highlight the discursive-material practices that helped craft the major category/(re)configuration: 'seizing one's position'.

These analytical steps aim to demonstrate how each (re)configuration is always realized in discursive-material practices and intra-acted, that is, comes to be/comes to matter, through a relationality to other, related practices. A particular identity intra-activity, then, illustrates an agential cut, that is, a specific, situated 'version' of the identity construction. In the forthcoming analysis, this version of the identity construction is labelled 'seizing one's position'. It is via the cut that the emerging and precarious boundaries of each category materialize and allow us to temporarily see the contours of the identity work being performed. This highlights that it is through the process of on-going intra-activity that phenomena come to matter and that the concept of intra-activity sensibilize us to see not only the intra-action, but also the phenomenon that is intra-acted; here, particular identity (re)configurations. In the proceeding section, all data excerpts used in the analysis have been translated from Danish to English.

6.1.5. 'SEIZING ONE'S POSITION'

To illustrate identity intra-activity and the analytical process of unpacking 'performing identities', I will develop an empirical analysis relating to one of the major categories/(re)configurations – seizing one's position – produced by a preliminary analysis across the data. The analysis presented is an example of the analytical movements throughout the study of identity work relating to the inherent case study. The development has two main objectives: firstly, I aim to show that, by considering the discursive-material resources that run throughout the teachers' practices, we gain insight into a particular (re)configuration of the teachers' identity work, enabling us to see how the act of seizing one's position is materialized as something that 'matters' when simultaneously being/becoming a teacher and an informal middle manager. Secondly, the analytical conceptualization, identity intra-activity, is presented as an avenue for explorations of discourse-materiality relationality in identity scholarship.

'Seizing one's position' became evident as one of the major categories when focusing the full body of data by posing the research question: 'What local "matter" seems to matter in the identity construction when enacting this position?' Throughout multiple movements during the process of analysis, four concepts were developed by continuously coding with a sensitivity towards discursive-material data that addressed particular enactments of this category, i.e. practices that incorporate material and discursive, social and scientific, human and nonhuman, and natural and cultural resources related to the category (Barad, 2003). These concepts were written up with a form of overarching discursive-material label, each elucidating a situated and

embodied practice of the particular category, these being: claiming space(s), juxta-positioning of time(s), performing availability and tropes-in-use. The following analytical development of the concepts that make up 'seizing one's position' demonstrates how the intra-action between them takes part in performing this particular identity-(re)configuration. It is structured using small introductory contextualizations that situate the analytical process in the local realities of these teachers and are collated from thick descriptions across the data.

Claiming space(s)

Most spaces in schools are designated as common spaces that 'belong' to particular groups. Classrooms and playgrounds belong to the pupils, the teachers' lounge belongs to the teaching staff and the administrative spaces belong to the school's management. Sometimes, if belonging to a group with no designated space, you become space-less and impelled to create your own (work) space within a common space, thus changing the 'nature' of both the space and work practices.

The category of seizing one's position became particularly evident in relation to some of the informal practices that enabled the teachers to establish a recognizable and visible position within the organization. Accordingly, this category centred especially on space and the practice of 'claiming' various physical and symbolic spaces, which helped to materialize a form of recognition and visibility. The teachers enacting this position typically did not have a claimed physical space that was theirs to prepare for a supervision, keep materials, have meetings etc. This meant that they often had to do their work 'on the go'; that is, they carried relevant materials with them all over the school and found empty spaces to work on an ad hoc basis. To deal with these circumstances, as mentioned above, the teachers found ways of 'claiming' different physical and symbolic spaces. For example, when one of the teachers was asked to document a pertinent aspect of her week in her log writings, she took a photo of a bookcase that she had unauthorizedly 'claimed' in the teacher's lounge containing the tools and materials relating to her new position. In the photo, one can see the bookshelf overflowing with different 'props', like papers, books, learning games and formal folders, communicating that "this is someone's space; don't touch!" The diverse props on the shelf and the appearance of something overflowing are all discursive-material resources that run throughout the practice of claiming space. They facilitate the materialization of the identity work relating to becoming a visible 'organizational other'; a person who needs space, specific materials, books etc.

Other teachers enacting the same position had developed similar practices and had claimed space in their schools by putting down strategically placed symbolic and material artifacts. For example, when teacher Linda claims a common meeting room by leaving certain formal-looking papers like tests and academic books on the table, it signals: this room is occupied by someone who is not only doing normal teacher-lesson-planning, but also 'heavier' organizational stuff. Even though this did not act

as a bullet-proof solution, it did, according to Linda, often make her colleagues use other spaces for meetings etc.

In both examples, 'claiming' as a discursive-material practice is a manifestation that concretely and practically enables a positioning related to the 'on-the-go-ness' and the 'otherness' of their work, but the practice is also a concrete embodiment of the discursive-material resources out of which the particular (re)configuration of their identity work is crafted. That is, the discourse-materiality entanglement displayed in the bookcase of formal props and overflow, as well as the symbolic artifacts left on the meeting room table are, as quoted earlier: "...a buzzing hive of activity – an 'assemblage' of ongoing performances and enactments" (Kuhn *et al.*, 2017, p. 32) that temporarily materializes as something that has come to matter when enacting this position. Thus, this practice is co-constituting of and performing the identity (re)configuration of seizing one's identity.

Juxta-positioning of time(s)

The school is structured in and through time(s). The bell rings, alluding to a linear time structured through clocks and calendars. The bodies in the schools move to the beat of this linear time, leaving behind a past and moving towards a future. Other times occasionally appear, they challenge the clock-time with 'demands' of meaning and 'what makes sense'.

Another practice, which intra-acts with 'claiming space' in the making-up of the current category, relates to the juxta-positioning of times, concerning the 'old' and the 'new' ways of enacting this position. As will be described below, times, such as old times and new times, are discursive-material resources which are incorporated into this practice and take part in enabling the materialization of seizing one's position.

Regardless of the fact that this positioning of the teacher is a relatively new one, there are ongoing developments within the expectations of these teachers, both formally and informally, and juxtapositioning old versus new makes this a form of practice that contributes to crafting this position as 'something' particular. This practice is commonly enacted during professional development sessions between the teachers under study (mentors) and colleagues (mentees) and works to concretely enable the materialization of the 'something' that they can offer to their colleagues. The practice will often allude to old times and ways of doing things as insufficient or less progressive, as opposed to a newer and modern time with more long-lasting, efficient and meaningful methods. As teacher Sally points out during one such session:

> The old way, I usually come in as an expert and take over the lesson, but in this new way, I'm a facilitator, we develop something together that's also valuable for you after I leave the room. (Fieldnotes, 09.26.18)

By referencing old versus new times, and thereby materializing the past and the future as subtle, yet useful, discursive-material agencies, a new and more meaningful positioning manifests itself in the dialogue between Sally and her colleague. Namely, a positioning of Sally as a facilitator of learning, as opposed to an expert.

Also, during meetings between the teachers and the school's management, while strategizing how best to evoke the 'right' conceptualization of their organizational responsibility, teacher Mike comments:

> The new way is a positive message, it's cool and it's development. It's not what the teachers on the floor want though. What they want is the old way, it's a 'fix it', a quick solution, which does not lead to their development. It leads to us fixing it. (Fieldnotes, 10. 22.18)

Again, this juxta-positioning of old and new times can be seen as materializing a certain positioning. In this latter quotation, the juxta-positioning of time(s) becomes an agency that produces the possibility of change in the expectations and desires of their colleagues. In other words, time, as a discursive-material resource, becomes an agency that invokes the past (i.e. the old ways) in the present, with hopes of changing the future. This shows that time(s) are co-constituting of an identity (re)configuration as the teachers draw upon the past to construct their current situation and imagine their future – the juxta-positioning of time(s) is therefore a discursive-material practice that enables the category of seizing one's position.

Performing availability

> *Entering the teachers' lounge, 'looseness' is felt, the smell of coffee is in the air. Papers, books, folded up posters, bags, jackets are spread out in one big tangle of 'break-time'. When they sit down, it means being approached – as an expert, an advice-giver, a helper. Colleagues needing just 'a quick word', colleagues with worries about pupil achievement, colleagues with IT problems...*

Throughout the data, performing availability, i.e. always being ready to be approached and 'invoked' as an organizational other, an expert or resource, was evident as a key form of practice relating to seizing one's (new) position. This activity incorporated both discourse-materiality relating to the presence of the teachers' bodies during school hours – at lunchtime, when teaching, passing by etc. – and matters of affect relating to this presence.

Concretely, the teachers' bodies are discursive-material resources that run through the practices of performing availability, since their mere presence in a room means being approachable and invokable as an available expert. Even in situations where they are clearly engaged in other activities unrelated to this position, e.g. eating lunch with

colleagues, teaching a class, immersed in their own lesson planning etc., the mere presence of their body means that they are 'open for business':

> Well, of course, it's nice to be of use. No doubt about that. But that's also why I go home if I need to correct some of my own pupils' papers or do my own lesson planning, because it's only at home that, um, I can sit undisturbed. Otherwise it gets all muddy and I'm constantly interrupted. (Lissy, interview, 11.11.18, p. 13)

Similar observations were made when tagging along with another teacher, Kirsten, into an all-staff meeting. While Kirsten was getting ready to give her presentation, hooking up her laptop, checking her slides etc., colleagues were queuing up to ask her questions regarding pupils who prompted some concerns, and good advice on this and that, although she was obviously very preoccupied (Kirsten, Fieldnotes, 25.10.18). Both Kirsten and Lissy seemed to accept this invocation of their 'otherness' or expertness by the mere presence of their bodies, and generally 'played along', answering questions and simply developing personal strategies for how to then get things done, such as Lissy's decision to work from home.

Performing availability, which was related to body-presence, was also described by teacher Elisabeth as always being willing to 'put on the yes-hat' (a Danish figure of speech), even if that meant being hailed while carrying out other activities. Putting on the yes-hat was yet another discursive-material resource enabling availability and is also directly related to matters of *a*ffect, including feelings relating to letting colleagues or management down by not responding promptly to requests and thereby not living up to her worth:

> It's important that I feel I can deliver a certain product, umm, with a certain quality to my colleagues... for example, by quickly resolving the challenges they face or the requests they pose. It's important for me that they feel I'm doing what I'm supposed to, I think. (Elisabeth, interview, 11.20.18)

Matters of affect are, in this case, co-constitutive of her identity work, since always being able to deliver and say yes is manifesting as part of performing availability. Bodies and matters of affect are, thus, discursive-material resources that can also be seen as forces or 'currents' of availability that participate in the construction process, that are part of a (re)configuration/version of their identity work.

Tropes-in-use

In meetings, in classrooms, when eating lunch with colleagues, imagery of what these teachers do is ever-present. This imagery 'attaches itself' to practices – as vibrant matter – that may or may not be picked up as

> *elucidators of 'what they do': It's a gift, help-to-self-help and quick-fixes.*

Tropes-in-use relate to practices that incorporate the use of figurative language as a discourse-material resource, and these tropes become evident across the data as useful agencies throughout the teachers' practices when they talk about their tasks and responsibilities within the schools. Often, the teachers have to navigate contrasting expectations, as alluded to in the quotation in the last section, when teacher Mike comments on how the new way of enacting his position is in conflict with what is desired by his colleagues: "It's not what the teachers on the floor want" (Fieldnotes, 10.22.18). Clearly, this contrast is facilitated by what is framed as 'the new way', which is a development instigated by the school's management, positioning the teachers in question in between expectations from 'the floor' and expectations from management. The tropes are co-constitutive of the new positioning and enable the negotiation of meaning and navigation of expectations that will (hopefully) lead to a particular future practice: that is, as Mike again points out: "something sustainable, not just a quick fix" (Fieldnotes, 11.29.18).

One such recurring trope is the word 'gift' and the depiction of their task, whether it be advice-giving, mentoring or co-teaching, as a gift they give to their colleagues by facilitating co-reflection of their colleagues' teaching and thus of their professional development: "It's important that we articulate, that this (read: their 'service') is a gift – we can talk about our reflections of why they do as they do and develop their teaching practices" (Elisabeth, Fieldnotes, 10.04.18).

By enacting "it's a gift", the trope becomes a discursive-material resource that runs throughout the practice of tropes-in-use that help to materialize imagined future tasks (i.e. the development of colleagues' teaching practices). These tropes, then, are discursive-material resources that convey their transition into something new when engaging in conversation about what they have to offer. For example, in different contexts, such as in feedback sessions with colleagues, over small-talk at lunch, but also at strategy meetings with school management where the 'right' conceptualization of their work is discussed. Particularly in the latter context, another prevalent trope in the data is enacted. Here, the teachers' work is described as tasks that should facilitate "help-to-self-help" (Fieldnotes, 10.23.18). This discursive-material resource supports the notion of moving beyond the above-mentioned quick-fix and involves solving concrete tasks for colleagues related to issues such as special-Ed aid, and the trope enables a materialization that provides support for long-term changes by assisting the development of colleagues' teaching practices. This trope-use is discussed as a way of encouraging colleagues to embrace the new way, and therefore also enables it. As one of the teachers points out during a meeting: "talking about help-to-self-help also helps to succeed with helping-to-self-help" (Fieldnotes, 10.23.18). As such, the use of tropes also becomes strategic in the sense that certain future work practices are made possible by 'talking in tropes'. This implies that, similarly to claiming space(s), the

juxtapositioning of time(s) and performing availability, discursive-material resources flow in/through these practices and participate in the co-constitution of 'seizing one's position' – demonstrating the intra-acted identity work.

6.1.6. READINGS ACROSS DISCOURSE-MATERIALITY: 'TRACING' IDENTITY WORK

With reference to the above analytical development of the discursive-material practices that help to make up the current category, employing parts of a Baradian universe demonstrates that the process of becoming 'something' is a process of mattering, as it is only when 'things' come to matter through their relationality to other things that 'something' in fact becomes; that is, materializes. The analysis gives an insight into the process of identity construction by showing how a particular version of the teachers' identity work is transformed, processed and (re)configured through the discursive-material resources that run in a comprehensive assemblage through the teachers' practices. These intra-acting practices produce the particular, yet temporary, agential cut relating to their identity construction which, as the analysis shows, has certain local (and future) implications/effects. For example, when the mere presence of the teachers' bodies in the lunch room means 'available' and thus leads to practices of leaving work in order to work (from home), we are led to see an implication of the intra-acted becoming, that of seizing one's position, as well as some of the embodied 'ingredients' in this construction process, such as bodies and matters of affect; elements that would otherwise perhaps go unnoticed. In Barad's own words, this is because they are nothing in themselves: "Outside of particular agential intra-actions, 'words' and 'things' are indeterminate" (Barad, 2003, p. 820). Relationality and the process of intra-activity are therefore at the crux of the mattering process. Indeed, this highlights that agency is fluid and does not belong to any one particular element, resource, subject or object (e.g. an artifact, a body or a particular discourse); rather, agency is 'accomplished' via the intra-activity and thus has a transformational potential. This implies that, not only do discursive-material resources run in/through practices, but they also take part in conditioning the identity work by making particular practices possible and constraining others, or rather, they co-produce "spaces of possibility" (Juelskjær, 2019, p. 15). In relation to the (re)configuration of seizing one's position, this involves an ongoing identity struggle, or 'identity dance', between the constraints and possibilities of simultaneously becoming/being a teacher and an organizational other. For example, when choosing to go home to get things done; when always seeming to be available in order not to potentially disappoint colleagues or to show your organizational worth/expertise; or when claiming common space in order to have simple working conditions, such as a designated work area and a bookcase and thus to be a legitimate organizational 'other' with a particular task besides teaching. We see the identity-dance of being a teacher and 'an other', but we also see the performative 'nature' of discourse-materiality, as new spaces of possibility, or organizing, are produced.

Clearly then, the concept of identity intra-activity is not invested in pointing to either discourse or materiality and discussing their specific form of agency in a specific situation, rather the concept articulates a position in which this perspective has been shifted to a more 'fluid' understanding of agency. Therefore, tracing identities and how they emerge when investigating identity construction becomes a process of being sensitive to discursive-material resources that matter in the data when identifying practices, but the process also involves reading across intra-actions and seeing the temporarily stabilized phenomenon in question. As Barad states: "It is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the 'components' of phenomena become determinate and that particular embodied concepts become meaningful" (Barad, 2003, p. 815). To extend this quotation, I therefore argue that identity intra-activity offers a process-sensitive way of thinking about the mattering process by sensibilizing us to see not only the intra-action, but also the particular identity (re)configuration that is made possible, as well as the constraints and possibilities of such materializations.

6.1.7. DISCUSSION: IMPLICATIONS OF IDENTITY INTRA-ACTIVITY

Intra-activity as a way of thinking about identity work

In this article, intra-activity is presented as the crux of everything that evolves and as a way of thinking that permits us to better understand processes of organizing, such as, for example, processes of identity construction. With this processual emphasis, the analytics that I am offering therefore contributes to conceptualization that allows us to view identity as something that is always in the act of becoming rather than a distinct entity. Moreover, the analytics pushes a becoming perspective further by approaching identity work in/through the entanglement of discourse and materiality. This shifts the focus from discourse as constitutive of identity work to the relationality of discourse-materiality as constituting, that is discourse-materiality is ever co-present and co-producing of identity work. In this article, becoming builds on insight into the local discursive-material practices out of which the identity work is crafted and performed, and the conceptualization thus brings a situatedness to the analysis. As a consequence, I therefore argue that thinking with intra-activity contributes to presenting identity work as a multidimensional phenomenon – dynamic and emerging – since this type of thinking sensibilize us to see the specific intra-actions of identities-in-action, locally, displaying the agentic activity across 'tangible' dimensions, such as, for example, hierarchical structures, organizational roles and positions – both formal and informal – but also across those that are less tangible. This includes matter such as affect, materiality, discourse, bodies, space, temporality and more, thus highlighting how identity constructions do not only occur in tangible and well-defined moments and well-defined contexts, but rather, they are expressed across a complex assemblage of moments, contexts and matter – in "... the inexhaustible dynamism of the enfolding of mattering" (Barad, 2007, p. 237). This also means that the human subject is but one of multiple agencies at play, intra-acting identity (re)configurations and thus not granted a privileged position. Therefore, the analytics I suggest also

supports and expands existing debates (Hultin & Introna, 2019; Scott & Orlikowski, 2015), arguing for a decentring of the intentional human subject as the primary actor in identity work by instead foregrounding the performative flow of discursive-material practices, which moreover constrains us from reproducing: "assumptions of subject and object as separate entities and identity as a realizable goal" (Hultin & Introna, 2019, p. 1364). Identity intra-activity aspires to contribute to questioning such 'clear cut' distinctions and perceptions of pre-existing entities and privileged positions, and by doing so it also allows for an investigation of how discourse and materiality condition the possibilities of identity work.

A new materialist and process-sensitive analytical approach to guide future research?

As highlighted in the section on connecting studies of discourse-materiality relationship to identity work, scholars have called for studies that attend more carefully to the ways in which discourse-material resources influence 'non-fixed' and ever-evolving identity construction processes. In compliance with a 'non-fixed' understanding of identity, an investigation taking inspiration from new materialist perspectives seems to be an obvious match and a fruitful theory-method 'fit' in order to foster greater understandings of how multiple resources influence and take part in this process. This is because the underlying assumptions of the precarious, contested and momentary 'nature' of organizational phenomena, such as identities, are shared. Therefore, the implications of allowing a new materialist analytical framework to guide the research practice of identity work are promising because the 'fit' may foster a greater sensitivity to identities-in-action, that is identity-practices, due to the attention to discursive-material resources that help us to (temporarily) untangle the entanglement. This means that the fit offers the potential to achieve insight into the ever-precarious and emerging, yet constitutive, resources that take part in crafting identity (re)configurations 'at play', illustrating the process of playing as well as the (re)configuration. In this sense, identity intra-activity helps to produce a process-sensitive analysis by recognizing all the playing agencies through their entanglement – they become 'data-in-motion' loaded with situatedness, embodiment, 'friction' and vibrancy, and pointing to spaces of possibilities.

Indeed, then, although still only a promising avenue for exploration, the proposed analytical approach and the suggested implications for future research practice echo Brown (2015) and his invitation to fellow scholars in a recent review of the (sub)field of identity work to go beyond the mere use of identity as a descriptive category and instead employ it as an analytical tool, because:

> Identity work, which implies agentic activity, is suited to the task of analyzing people and events across levels of analysis and research foci because it helps fix attention on identities-in-action and unpick processes of continuity and change, rather that apply labels to notional end states. (Brown, 2015, p. 33)

The aim of this article is to stimulate further engagement with explorations of the processes of becoming, impermanence and change, that embrace the multiple situated and embodied resources. Identity intra-activity, as a new materialist and process-sensitive analytical approach to and conceptualization of the identity construction process, is perhaps a viable option for exactly that.

6.1.8. CONCLUSION

In this article, I have proposed an analytical conceptualization of the investigation of identity work by introducing a co-constitutive perspective on discourse-materiality in identity construction processes, taking inspiration from new materialist theorist, Karen Barad, and organizational discourse studies. The proposed conceptualization, identity intra-activity, seeks to enable an exploration of the co-constitutive intra-activity of discourse-materiality that performs particular (re)configurations of identity work, i.e. particular features, identi*ties*, or identity transformations.

Building on a case study of the emergence of a new, informal middle-management positioning of selected teachers within public education in Denmark, I have shown that, by considering the multiple resources that work to perform identi*ties*, we gain insight into a temporarily stabilized agential cut; a (re)configuration of the teachers' identity work. This enables us to see how the (re)configuration of seizing one's position is materialised through multiple discursive-material and embodied resources that run throughout the teachers' practices. This creates a petri dish for examining the situated enactment of their identity work and, by implication, highlighting that the teachers' practices are already subsumed and governed in discursive, material, political and a range of other 'forces' which should not go unnoticed in our analysis of identity construction processes, because they take part in conditioning the identity work by producing certain spaces of possibility. The findings therefore make it possible to attend to the complexities of becoming and their potential inherent effects and help us to understand identity work as characterized by multiple situated and embodied resources. Identity intra-activity, I argue, therefore sensibilize us to see not only the intra-action (the becoming/transformation), but also the phenomenon that is intra-acted. It does so by enabling the intra-activity that performs particular identi*ties* and thus produces a new way of thinking about identity construction. As such, the article's findings and the proposed analytics also facilitate a platform to expand relational views of discourse-materiality in the existing literature on identity work.

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6.2. ARTICLE THREE

This is an original manuscript submitted to the international, peer-reviewed journal, *Culture and Organization.* Awaiting editor's response.

CHAPTER 7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this final chapter, I reiterate the research problem and research questions of this dissertation and embark upon developing the answers that this research offers. In doing so, I also offer a discussion about the performative effects on the teacher as a middle manager. I continue by elaborating on the overall contribution to scholarly knowledge. In closing, I outline some limitations of the research and suggest potential implications for future research.

7.1. REITERATING THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

In the introductory chapter, I explained how middle management positions recently given to chosen teachers as an effect of the latest school policy reform in Denmark (UVMa, 2013) are emerging as way to support school management in creating a more effective and academically enhanced school and, eventually, improved student outcome. Puzzled by the becoming of these middle management positions in the great mesh of policy reforms, local school management, teacher colleagues, students, 'normal' teacher tasks, politics, expectations and more, this study sought to explore the constituting dynamics and the performative effects of such becomings – including the complexities and muddled organizing processes inherent in this work. In order to better understand middle management as a constitutive process and ongoing becoming, I developed an approach that combines constitutive perspectives within organizational discourse studies (Iedema, 2003; Kuhn *et al.*, 2017) with new materialist theorizing, and particularly the work of Karen Barad (2003, 2007). This involved focusing on how 'things' (discourse, politics, bodies, materiality, structures etc.) come together – and thus I foregrounded the relationality and mutual constituting power of things. This enabled me to rethink notions of middle management as something far more fluid, blurrier and 'wider' than a formal and hierarchical form of organizing. The latter is how it is presented in the majority of studies on middle management, which limits how we approach and understand the phenomenon. This means that – in order to better grasp and understand the complex becomings that permeate hierarchical forms of organizing – this research has rearticulated conventional premises of study in the middle management literature; from functionalist assumptions about hierarchy to more constitutive and performative perspectives conditioning middle management.

7.2. ANSWERS TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research problem, outlined in the previous section, produced one overall research question and three specifying questions, which this dissertation set out to answer:

How are middle management positions becoming, discursively and materially, across daily work practices in selected primary and lower secondary schools? With which performative effects on the teacher as a middle manager?

Supporting questions:

- *How can I develop empirical methods that are sensitive to the discourse-materiality relations shaping middle management positions?*
- *Through which identity work are new middle management positions emerging?*
- *And through which organizing processes is the work of middle managers becoming?*

In the following, I will take each supporting question in turn. Then I will discuss the second part of the overall research question, whereby I focus on the performative effects on the teacher as a middle manager by reading across the insights produced throughout the chapters and the research articles in this dissertation.

How can I develop empirical methods that are sensitive to the discourse-materiality relations shaping middle management positions?

As part of this research's methodology, and in the first article of this dissertation, I developed a relational perspective on the study of organizations and organizing phenomena. The purpose of this was to strengthen a methodological focus across critical branches of management and organization studies and thereby develop methods that, in fact, enable us to approach the discourse-materiality relations that take part in constructing our phenomena, here middle management positions. In the article, my co-author and I argue that this particular approach demands a sensitivity towards multimodality (Iedema, 2003, 2007) when developing methods and performing fieldwork. This entails a form of embedded and embodied research practice that acknowledges 'the multimodal', such as, bodies, spaces, times, feelings, materialities, discourses etc. as co-constituting of the phenomenon in question. Thus, our approach abandons a strictly mono-modal discursive (or material) focus and thus responds to ongoing debates within organizational discourse studies concerning an overemphasis on discourse in linguistic terms (Iedema, 2003; Phillips & Oswick, 2012). To do so, we developed the approach of a framework for retooling methods for multimodality. This was developed taking inspiration from organizational discourse studies (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Kuhn *et al.*, 2017; Putnam, 2015) and new materialist theorizing, in particular the work of Karen Barad (2003, 2007). Corresponding to our interest in studying constitutive dynamics, Barad's theorizing

offered a conceptual framework for conceiving of such dynamics of relational becoming, while the concept of multimodality facilitated a research practice that acknowledged those dynamics.

To illustrate our approach, we described two method developments. The first concerned the retooling of exploratory interviews by introducing multimodal vignettes in the interview settings. This showed that, by introducing the vignette into the interview, the vignette itself develops agency and takes part, alongside the other agents present, such as the interview room, the bodies, the interview conversation and pictures, in the relational becoming of particular middle management positions. The second method development concerned retooling observations, and here we presented a form of mapping of multimodalities while 'tagging along' with the field participants. This entailed acknowledging the multimodalities that come to matter in a given situation, which involved the sometimes tangible, sometimes subtle participation of, for example, the unsaid, what is said, a room full of tension, materialities or the symbolic.

Thus, the answer to this research question is that, by retooling our methods and thereby developing a sensitivity towards multimodality when planning and performing fieldwork, we are able to approach the constituting dynamics of discourse-materiality. This is valuable because it can facilitate a responsivity towards emerging local issues and provide richer, more complex data. Thus, it can generate insights into what temporally comes to matter as, for example, middle management. In terms of utilizing multimodal vignettes in interview settings, the retooling helped to elucidate how middle managers' identity struggles of balancing being an (organizational) expert and a mere colleague offering friendly advice emerge across bodies, materialities, emotions, photos etc. Through multimodal mapping, retooling observations likewise produced insights into the ongoing identity work, and particularly insights into swapping mechanisms and transitions between being a teacher and becoming a middle manager that were facilitated by multimodalities, such as books, a hallway or certain words, all in a split second.

Through which identity work are new middle management positions emerging?

In the literature review and the second article of this dissertation, I explored the identity construction processes related to this new middle management position and thus engaged with the identity scholarship developing within critical branches of management and organization studies (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Harding *et al.,* 2017; Hultin & Introna, 2019). Concretely, I set out to explore the process of identity construction by considering the ways in which discourse-materiality works to perform identities. As part of this exploration, I developed an analytical approach to the investigation of such processes, which I coined 'identity intra-activity'. In doing so, I was particularly inspired by insights developing within organizational discourse studies (Hardy & Thomas, 2015; Iedema, 2003; Kuhn *et al.*, 2017; Orlikowski & Scott, 2015) and new materialist thinking (Barad, 2003, 2007, 2013). This approach

enabled an understanding of identity work as materialized by intra-acting discursive-material resources, enacted in/through the middle managers' everyday practices. Hence, the article also aimed to promote a research agenda focusing on the co-constitutive 'play' between discursive-material resources in identity work and their performative effects.

In the second article, I argued that this performative focus is central because it allows us to see things that would otherwise sometimes go unnoticed. That is, the fact that identity construction processes are subsumed and governed by discursive and material resources and practices that have local effects, both shaping and conditioning the identity work. The analysis demonstrated that the process of becoming 'something' is a process of mattering – with reference to Barad – as it is only through relationality to other 'things' that particular features of, for example, the identity work materialize. I showed how versions of the middle managers' identity work are transformed and configured through the discursive-material resources that run through their everyday practices. Such resources consisted, for example, of books left on tables enacting an informal claim over spaces, or particular tropes facilitating certain desirable futures – all taking part in an identity construction process concerning a particular identity (re)configuration: 'seizing one's position'. As part of this process, some practices were made possible and others were constrained, and the identity work thus unfolded as spaces of possibility (Juelskjær, 2013). For the middle managers, who are also teachers, this involved an ongoing 'identity dance' between the constraints and possibilities of simultaneously becoming/being a teacher and an organizational other (i.e., occupying a middle management position). The analytical approach of identity intra-activity therefore allowed me to see both a particular 'dance' and the performativity of discourse-materiality, since new spaces of possibility were continuously being produced as part of this dance.

Thus, to answer the second supporting question, new middle management positions are emerging in/through identity intra-activity. That is, I show that the relationality of multiple discursive-material resources come to perform particular (re)configurations of identity work, involving certain ongoing identity transformations and, in the case of the article's analysis, an identity dance – an agential cut and thus a temporarily stabilized performed identity entanglement. In this way, the findings generate insight into how seizing one's position is made up, so to speak, of an overflowing bookcase, multiple tropes, times and bodies – resources that come to matter and take part in configuring their identity work when a becoming of middle management entangles with that of a teacher.

Through which organizing processes is the work of middle managers becoming?

In order to answer the last supporting question, I have explored the organizing processes and the becoming of the work of middle managers in the literature review and in Article Three. I explored the work of middle managers as a situated and ongoing practice, moving and changing in blurred ways in/through a mesh of clear

and unclear distinctions – across multiple actors, including structures, relations, tasks, logics etc. Hence, the organizing processes through which work was becoming were permeating hierarchical forms of organizing. Inspired by the concept of liminality (Borg & Söderlund, 2014; Johnson & Sørensen, 2015; Sturdy *et al.* 2009), I argued that these blurred work practices were, in fact, demarcating middle management work as liminal and thereby inherently ambiguous. In order to facilitate an analytical sensitivity towards the constituting features of the liminal, including related spatial and temporal considerations, I utilized the new materialist concept of spacetimemattering (Barad, 2003, 2007, 2014). This was useful due to the focus on constituting relations of different actors and their performative effects. When applying this concept, space, time and matter became performative features producing middle management work – and thus a practice materialized by non-linear time(s) and non-static space(s). In this way, the article elucidated how a form of space and time 'boundness' produced certain (liminal) conditionings of middle management work.

The findings unpacked how liminal work involved entanglements of spatio-temporalities, producing a liminal pull. Concretely, this meant that the liminal work emerged through so-called hard and soft times, on and off the clock, as well as formal and informal spaces and inside and outside spaces. As a part of this liminality, the article also showed that this conditioning comes to matter as both complexity-maximizing and complexity-reducing features of everyday work. This led to a discussion of whether middle management work is, in fact, a form of liminal management, implying that middle managers need certain liminal competences (Borg & Söderlund, 2014, 2015).

Thus, the answer to this research question is that the work of middle managers is becoming in moving and blurred ways, which cut across boundaries, structures, tasks, feelings, relationships, materialities and more. It extends the hierarchical charts and formal job descriptions. This means that the organizing processes of middle management work materialize not (only) in terms of a hierarchical location, but rather in 'thick' moments – haunted by a multiplicity of spaces, times and matter that *do* something to their work. It reconfigures their work as liminal.

In the next section, I will turn to discussing further implications of the performative effects on the teacher as a middle manager. The section is developed on the basis of the insights generated by this research, and responds to the second half of the overall research question.

7.3. THE PERFORMATIVE EFFECTS ON THE TEACHER AS A MIDDLE MANAGER

As I argue in the review of literature addressing middle management, and expand on further in Article Three, a number of studies within the middle management literature conceptualize middle management as a hierarchical form of organizing, a formal position within an organization. Thus, they invite explorations of middle management as something that is best understood in terms of its whereabouts within the hierarchy – a fixed practice.

The type of inquiry that I am offering in this dissertation, and that the three article contributions touch upon from various entangled angles – methodologically, analytically and empirically – is committed to challenging predefined notions of middle management. This provides an avenue to explore, not only *how* these positions become beyond hierarchies and charts, but also the performative effects that these particular becomings produce. By this, I mean that the particular approach I have put forward is also invested in better understanding that which comes to matter and the kind of significance it produces for the teachers as middle managers.

In a discussion of the performative effects of middle management, one such thing that comes to matter and carries significance is considerations of middle management positions as practices (Kuhn, 2020).[12] In both Articles Two and Three this holds significance for what we might consider including or looking at when we become interested in middle management. That is, if we are no longer limited to concerns about *a* middle, but have 'widened' our perspective and directed our attention towards their work practices, we become able to elucidate and explore the particular challenges and conditions of this work. As developed further in Article Three, this involves, for example, seeing that there are certain problematics in terms of navigating the liminal, which the middle managers are not quite equipped to handle. Or, in terms of their identity work, we are able see that the significance of always being available to one's colleagues is that the middle managers have to leave work in order to work. What we can therefore gain by rethinking how we conceptualize middle management is a view of all the tangible *and* subtle stuff, the discourse-materiality, that runs in the cracks, or rather in their practices. These are the constituting forces of middle management that lead us to then be able to approach the performative effects of, for example, their identity work and liminal work.

Discussing this further highlights that 'doing' middle management does not represent an objective reality, a fixed middle-management practice. Rather, it is the iterative

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[12] In referencing practices, I refer to related understandings developing within work and theorizing inspired by new materialism (Barad, 2003; Orlikowski & Scott, 2015) as well as developments within organizational discourse studies, and more specifically the CCO project. Within this latter body of literature, practices are framed as communication (see e.g., Ashcraft *et al*., 2009; Brummans *et al*., 2014).

practices of middle managers, reform policies, colleagues, tasks, school management and matter that create the phenomenon of middle management. This view take inspiration from Butler's (1993) notion of performativity and Barad's (2003) expansion of the same, by which Barad draws our attention to the fact that certain practices have 'complementary' effects that are constitutive of how, for example, middle management realities may materialize. This is relevant because it opens up opportunities for researchers and practitioners to discuss what the effects of how we view phenomena might be. Moreover, in regard to the context of this study, what are the reform-affected realities of middle management that we intra-act – and are those realities the ones we want materialized?

As developed in this dissertation, in a school reality affected by recent reform initiatives (UVM, 2013), which displays trends towards more shared and distributed forms of management, middle managers are increasingly enacting organizational agendas alongside their 'normal' teaching responsibilities. Previously accounted for in national evaluations (EVA, 2009, 2015), such hybrid practices have prompted some struggles and tensions related to middle managers being positioned as an organizational other through new and added responsibilities such as coaching or otherwise sharpening colleagues' teaching practices. Due to the awareness of these struggles, new strategies for legitimizing middle managers to a greater extent as a new organizational actor – acting on a form of mandate from school management – have been developed (EVA, 2015). This entails, for instance, school management communicating clearly with the whole staff that the middle managers are not acting on their own, they are acting and knocking on the classroom doors of colleagues on instructions from school management.

Although these initiatives of formally legitimizing the practices of middle managers do indeed seem to have reduced some of the struggles, what this study has shown is that the complexity of the position has not been removed. The complexity simply seems to run and materialize in different assemblages, appearing as effects in different agential cuts. In this study, the effects to which I am referring are, for example, the many practices that concern collegiality: never saying 'no' to requests from colleagues, even at inconvenient times, abstaining from 'letting go' at parties, working at home if you need to focus, making sure that you are not always seen hanging around management – rather often being seen in the teachers' lounge with your colleagues during breaks. These are the more fluid effects – the ones that are not necessarily addressed by legitimizing the middle manager as an actor *in* the middle of the organizational hierarchy. The issues of concern prompted by this in the example of collegiality is, thus, the need for a form of added (re)legitimacy for middle managers as colleagues. That is, it may also be relevant to consider how we can nourish, protect and care for these middle managers as colleagues. How can schools create legitimacy, not only around their middle management positions, but also around their collegiality and other more fluid effects that extend beyond hierarchical forms of organizing?

Moving forward, a greater focus on and exploration of these more fluid effects seems pertinent if we are to properly support employees in such positions, as well as enable some of the generative prospects that shared and distributed forms of management produce. This also raises questions of how to manage a particular group of employees – those in hybrid positions, which is a position clearly diverging from managing, for example, a staff of all teachers. To name a few examples, this concerns managing a group of employees who have 'extended' authority by means of influencing decision-making, all school initiatives, discourses etc., yet only informally. It also concerns managing a group of employees who are enacting several positions and liaisoning between strategic development and teaching 6th grade. Although issues of complexities in managing schools have previously been explored to some extent in a Danish context (F. B. Andersen, 2014; Juelskjær *et al.*, 2011), in closing, I argue that there is room for more empirical insights into managing middle managers in schools in order to develop careful consideration and explicit awareness of what could be described as the non-fixed aspects of middle management work.

In the following section, I will briefly summarize the conclusions of this dissertation and respond to the overall research question. Moreover, I will specify the contributions I am making to scholarly knowledge.

7.4. SUMMARIZING CONCLUSIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

How are middle management positions becoming, discursively and materially, across daily work practices in selected primary and lower secondary schools? With which performative effects on the teacher as a middle manager?

In answering the overall research question, this research shows that the becoming of middle management positions is constituted in/through the relationality of human and non-human actors (discourse-materiality). This means that policy reforms, middle managers, school management, relationships, expectations, tasks and matter all take part in this becoming and materialize in certain practices and forms of organizing, thus permeating organizational structures and formal job descriptions. In this study, the becomings have specifically materialized as identity entanglements and liminal work practices.

Through examining this process, the research shows that middle management work is a demarcated becoming comprising of situated and negotiated practices, such as claiming spaces to work, negotiating access to give feedback to colleagues and navigating changing relationships within a split second by the use of a particular word or by abstaining from becoming 'too' sociable at parties. These practices sometimes manifest as competing and conflicting 'forces' that the middle manager has to

navigate – producing particular identity struggles and ambiguous work practices, which can involve both complexity-maximizing and complexity-reducing processes.

This research also answers the question by drawing attention to becomings as informal constructions of middle management. This means that the findings have shown that middle management also becomes in an interplay of informal and formal practices – in the cracks within and between schedules, schemas, structures, bodies, relations etc. This means, that the insights gained in this dissertation are an account of the subtle, yet potent, constituting powers of discourse-materiality and their performative effects.

Lastly, the research discusses the performative effects on teachers as middle managers and concludes that these effects concern that which comes to matter in/through everyday practices and the kind of significance it produces. The implications of this is that practices have 'complementary' effects and are constituting of how, for example, middle management realities may materialize. In concluding, the research also indicates that, so far, the attempts to minimize the complexity of middle management work nationally have only addressed the effects of their work in relation to the middle manager as an actor *in* the middle of the organizational hierarchy. This has left the more fluid effects beyond hierarchical forms of organizing unattended. Lastly, more concern with how to manage middle managers while retaining an awareness of these more subtle and fluid effects is encouraged.

As the findings illustrate, this dissertation contributes to critical branches of middle management studies. However, by contributing to this field, I expand upon and extend the extant literature by developing a particular approach to the study of middle management in which I combine insights from organizational discourse studies and new materialist theorizing. In doing so, the dissertation engages with ongoing debates and developments regarding discourse-materiality relations within organizational discourse studies, and, as such, the dissertation also contributes to organizational discourse. In the following, I will outline my contributions to the two fields.

Contributions to the literature on middle management
This study contributes to the field of middle management by extending and expanding critical and discursive perspectives on middle management. In doing so, I offer a more processual and constitutive perspective on the becoming of middle management positions and the particular performative effects of such becomings (Ainsworth *et al*., 2009; Linstead & Thomas, 2002; Pors, 2016).

As a subfield to broad management and organization studies, middle management has been, and still is, deeply entangled with the theories and conceptualizations developing within this field. As a consequence, middle management has been investigated through an organizational lens, leading to studies of middle managers as 'bricks', or layers in an organizational chart. Thus, in the literature, the 'story' of middle management is influenced, implicitly or explicitly, by demarcations of middle

management in hierarchical terms. That is, as a fixed and static space in-between the floor and the strategic apex (e.g., Dopson & Stewart, 1990; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997; Keys & Bell, 1982; Mintzberg, 1989; Thompson, 1967). This has led a number of studies to reproduce somewhat realist assumptions about middle management existing *in* prescribed hierarchical constructions, which sets a certain premise for, and thus limits, how middle management is ultimately to be studied and understood. Such an approach leaves underexplored, for example, explorations of middle management as an ongoing becoming in/through everyday work practices, including more or less informal constructions of middle management.

This dissertation contributes to the field of middle management by developing an approach inspired by organizational discourse studies (Ashcraft *et al.*, 2009; Kuhn *et al*., 2017; Orlikowski & Scott, 2015; Hardy& Thomas, 2015) and new materialist theorizing (Barad, 2003, 2007, 2008, 2014) to the understanding of middle management as an ongoing becoming, rather than a static position. Thus, I rethink and rearticulate notions of hierarchy and formality and show how such becomings materialize in the precarious practices of everyday work. Hence, I go beyond the previously mentioned prevalent accounts of middle management as a formal, hierarchical form of organizing. Instead, I produce an account that demarks middle management as intra-actively produced in/through a mesh of human and non-human actors, or discourse-materiality. This enables me to see particular agential cuts and temporary features of middle management materializing across hierarchies and structures. This perspective also enables a new questioning of middle management that focuses on what ongoingly becomes and comes to matter as middle management. For example, we get to see the situated and precarious negotiation of 'access' to colleagues' classrooms playing out in an entanglement of past/future experiences as a colleague and a teacher, nods and smiles, particular attuned words, expert-books and protocols. All of these entangled human and non-human actors are what is demarked as middle management in this study. These are the constituting forces that we get to trace, including the performative effects – the more or less desirable realities that may materialize as part of the particular agential cuts. By utilizing such insights, we are also able to approach, discuss and potentially reevaluate such materialized realities. For instance, when the findings show that a performative effect of the blurred and changing relationship between the middle managers and their colleagues is a demand that the middle managers refrain from being 'too' social by having a glass of wine at parties, we are able to address this position as one that may require a form of (re)legitimization of the middle manager as a colleague – as discussed in the previous section.

Furthermore, this means that the new questions about middle management, which are enabled by this approach, entail letting go of mere human-centred explorations and the related struggles and tensions around 'the human body's' constructions of being stuck in the middle. This highlights that there is indeed a construction, but the human

body is not alone in this construction (Cooren, 2020; Hardy & Thomas, 2015; Kuhn *et al.,* 2017; Orlikowski & Scott, 2015; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009).

In summarizing my contributions to the field of middle management, I foreground how a constitutive perspective – and inherently a non-privileging of human intentionality – contributes with non-hierarchical conceptualizations. These allow for a view, not only of the constitutive dynamics, but also of the significance of such dynamics, their performative effects, when becoming middle management.

Contributions to the literature on organizational discourse studies

This dissertation has explored the discourse-materiality constitution of emerging middle management positions. As part this exploration, my aim was also to develop new ways of approaching such constitutive dynamics, which manifested at both a methodological and an analytical level.

In developing this approach, I engaged with ongoing debates regarding discourse-materiality within critical branches of management and organization studies, more specifically organizational discourse studies (Grant *et al.*, 2004), including the communicative constitution of organization perspective (Cooren *et al.*, 2011; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009). As such, I have been particularly concerned with the literature that seeks to extend perspectives viewing discourse as a mere linguistic matter (Iedema, 2011; Kuhn & Putnam, 2014; Mumby, 2011; Putnam, 2015; Hardy & Thomas, 2015). I took inspiration from the significant contributions emerging from the scholarly debates and conceptualizations related to a discourse *as* materiality position (Phillips & Oswick, 2012). This includes research interests into the mutually constituting relationship of discourse and materiality (Iedema, 2003) – also coined as discourse-materiality relationality (Kuhn *et al.*, 2017).

While still echoing these rich analytical and conceptual developments, I was compelled to push the notion of discourse-materiality relationality even further to fully embrace what could be called a turn to materiality within organizational discourse (Cooren, 2020; Orlikowski & Scott, 2015) in order to better understand the situated and vibrating mess and mesh – the ongoing constituting forces at play – and their effects on the becoming of middle management. Inspired by new materialism, and particularly the work of Barad (2003, 2007), this entailed adopting a radical form of ontology, what I have previously described as a becoming ontology, that insists on dissolving any notions of discourse or materiality as entities and inherently foreground that it is only in/through relations that anything comes to exist. Combining the insights of a discourse *as* materiality position that is developing within organizational discourse with performative perspectives within new materialist theorizing has enabled me to conceive of the messy process of *how* multiple 'things' (discourse, politics, bodies, materiality etc.) intra-act and produce particular becomings of middle management. Moreover, it has directed my attention towards the significance of such

intra-actions, that is, an understanding of that which comes to matter, or makes a difference (Barad, 2007).

The developed framework that I offer here thus contributes by extending a relational view of discourse-materiality in the investigation of organizations and organizing (Cooren, 2020; Iedema, 2011; Kuhn 2020; Kuhn *et al.,* 2017; Orlikowski & Scott, 2015;). Thus, it responds to a call for more relational approaches within organizational discourse to further develop our knowledge of the constituting dynamics of discourse-materiality (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Philips & Oswick, 2012; Putnam, 2015). Concretely, the dissertation contributes by extending the conceptual discussions to include methodological concerns. Hence, it contributes by 'stretching' these developments to encompass a rethinking of our methodologies so that they too attune to the constituting dynamics of discourse-materiality. As I have elaborated in the findings, this entails utilizing the concept of multimodality (Iedema, 2003) as a way to facilitate an embedded and embodied research practice when planning and performing fieldwork through a retooling of our methods:

> ...this means being sensitive to multiple multimodalities, whether subtle or tangible, and recognizing them as part of the mutual shaping of a phenomenon: what is said, what is not said, policy texts materializing in local translations and manifesting in practice, the absence of a workspace, materials or notebooks, technology (e.g., iPads, smartboards used in presentations), the decor, the (inter-)actions of teachers, pupils and management, body language, affective aspects etc. are all potential intra-acting multimodalities when the teachers enact their positioning. In other words, an extensive apparatus of intra-actions constitutes this positioning, which requires methods that are sensitive to exactly this. (Dille & Plotnikof, 2020, p. 492)

Although the importance of advancing our methodologies to approach discourse-materiality relationality is highlighted in the literature (Hardy & Grant, 2012; Iedema, 2007), the development of practical tools, as well as insights into the potentials and challenges of such an endeavour, is still quite marginal. As a consequence, we may refrain from discussing the premises of our investigations, such as our quality criteria or how we manage multimodal data. Moreover, we might be tempted to conduct 'business as usual' – for example, privileging discourse in linguistic terms or human intentionality. This contribution therefore aspires to facilitate increased attention towards our method developments that is up to par, so to speak, with the rich conceptual developments that have been achieved within the field.

7.5. LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

In this section, I draw attention to the limitations of my research. The research conducted in relation to this dissertation is based on the logics of an ethnographic case study – a research tradition that typically favours depth over breath (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). This means, as described in "Chapter 2: Research Context", that I did not aim to present any generalizable truths or claims about middle management, nor did I aim to generalize across the two case schools with which I worked. Rather, I was interested in investigating the situated particularities and thereby producing thicker and more complex data. This meant participating in daily life at the two schools as much as possible.

Daily life is often messy and full of changes, especially when you work in a school, where the well-being of students and learning activities clearly take precedence. This means that my study was obviously constrained to follow aspects that were prioritized by the schools. While the two case schools with which I collaborated allowed me to enter and participate in a wide range of everyday activities, I was nevertheless constrained to comply with the settings that made it possible for me to enter. This meant sometimes not being able to participate in meetings due, for example, to certain sensitive matters in relation to students or teachers being discussed, or events being cancelled, postponed etc.

Another aspect concerning the selection of settings that I could meaningfully take part in as potentially generating insight into their everyday activities, had to do with the duration of the shadowings I performed. Since these middle managers are still primarily teachers, the vast majority of their work time is spent doing exactly that. Since I was also interested in the transitions between the position of teacher and that of middle manager, I spent a lot of time considering where and for how long it would make sense for me to shadow the middle managers. I had to find a balance between being there, tagging along where the blurred 'stuff' was particularly prone to appear, without participating in all of their regular teaching tasks, such as teaching science to 8th grade. As described in "Chapter 5: Methodology", this resulted in hanging out and tagging along for as much time as seemed relevant 'around' the formal settings, such as meetings, observations etc. Clearly, a consequence of this is that I might have missed some opportunities for generating even more complex data about the entanglements of middle management and teacher positions relating to their identity work and work practices that might have emerged if I had opted to stay throughout their whole workday.

7.6. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Critical reflection upon the insights generated in this dissertation highlights some potential implications for future research.

One such implication concerns middle management research. Considering the findings of this dissertation and the focus on middle management as a becoming that emerges in/through everyday practices, I see great potential in further exploring some of the politized aspects conditioning this position. This becomes particularly interesting when enacting informal forms of middle management, where, as in the current case study, the middle managers spend most of their time as 'peers' with the colleagues whom they sometime co-manage. In the context of the current case study, and primary and lower secondary schools in Denmark more generally, manifestations of informal middle management positions with varying responsibilities, labels and expectations are growing in number. This suggests that some of the findings of this dissertation are indeed relevant to continue exploring. This would involve, for example, further empirical investigations of how this work actually emerges and the implications of becoming in such a politicized climate. It would also be interesting when further investigating such informal constructions to focus on some of the generative prospects to which this dissertation also points. For example, when showing that middle managing colleagues also produces a form of easier access, leading to potentially influencing teaching practices, due to, for example, established relationships, shared memories and a common professional identity.

Another implication concerns potential contributions of new materialism to future research within organizational discourse. Firstly, this involves continuing to push our method developments and innovations to better approach discourse-materiality relations, as highlighted in the previous section. For this, the inspiration from new materialism seems like a promising avenue. This relates to the rather imperative universe offered by Barad's theorizing in particular. Here, I am pointing to the radicality that such perspectives propose in terms of an ontology that insists on its inseparability from epistemology – a practice of knowing in being (Barad, 2007). This forces us to recognize that, not only are our methods inseparable from the 'objects' we are studying, they also take part in constituting these objects. This idea is also what inspired me to explore further how to develop methods that are sensitive to particular intra-acting relationalities and their effects.

Indeed, this inseparability also relates to the way in which we account for our research. Barad touches upon this aspect when reminding us to be aware that our knowledge production has real and materialized effects. She reminds us to be aware of the new possibilities that we help breathe life into (Barad, 2008). She stresses a particular ethics (ethics are obviously not exclusive to Barad) when performing research: "Ethics is about accounting for our part of the entangled webs we weave" (Barad, 2008, p. 335). In building upon such ideas, I would like to turn to our academic texts and

writings as a suggestion for future research developments within organizational discourse. As researchers, when we seek to account for our findings, we do so by writing – most often in scientific journals, where written words are typically the foundational form of our accountings. Taking inspiration from new materialism, and particularly from Barad and the idea of inseparability, I propose that such theorizing has the potential to disturb or disrupt our scientific practice of writing. In illustrating this point further, I call on Richardson (2004), who recommends exploring other genres when accounting for our scholarly knowledge. She highlights the poem as a way to reach and discuss our findings with a different audience, one that extends beyond our academic peers. Clearly, some would argue that this is an equally abstract and complex genre. However, the point I am making is that rethinking and rearticulating the study of organizations and organizing, drawing inspiration from new materialism and ideas of inseparability, might produce a temporary 'threshold' for accounting for our findings in innovative genres, such as poetry or picture diaries, as complementary accounts to our academic writings. Indeed, this concerns reaching new audiences outside of academia, but it is also a suggestion to start experimenting with the greater inclusion of different modalities in our write-ups (pictures, drawings, links to video clips etc.) as an avenue to start having new discussions and asking new types of questions. This could form an avenue for thinking about our scholarly accountings as a continuation of our frameworks, thus finding new ways to include, present and elaborate upon situated, vibrating, embodied stuff. When developing this potential of new materialist inquiry and inseparability, the radicality thus also lies in how far-reaching the influences of this framework potentially are – from planning and developing fieldwork and generating data, to approaching our phenomena in the analytical machine room, to writing up our findings – the suggestions is that future research should explore the potentialities of this inquiry by disrupting our academic writings. Critically reflecting upon the contributions of this dissertation, I acknowledge that this is also a promising avenue for me to explore further.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Interview guides

Interview guide – individual, middle managers, 2018

	Guiding questions
Prelude	- Is there a particular pertinent theme that is important for us to discuss throughout the interview? - Basic info and work life: background, titles - What made you want to pursue middle management?
Middle managing at this school	- Describe a 'normal' working week - What tasks take up most of your time? - Who/what is important for your work as a middle manager? - Expectations to your work (your own, school management's, colleagues') - Have these expectations changed within the past couple of years? - Who defines your job tasks and responsibilities?
Being a teacher and a middle manager	- What does it require for you to be both a middle manager and a colleague at the same time? - How do you handle issues related to being both? - Positive/negative aspects of being both 'this and that' – describe a situation you have been in relating to this (positive or negative)
Vignette (read vignette out loud)	- What does this depiction make you think of? - How do you perceive my interpretation of your everyday? - Would you say it describes something typical related to your practices as a middle manager?
Future development	Thought experiment: A neighbouring school is interested in developing the number and use of middle managers in order to improve, e.g., school efficiency. They want to invite you to talk about your experiences and provide input to their process of enhancing their use of middle managers. What would your perspectives and advice be?

Photo	I have brought a photo from your weekly log that I found particularly interesting. • Expand on why this says something about your everyday as a middle manager.
Closing	• Did we miss anything? • Did our conversation make you reflect on anything you want to add?

Interview guide – individual, vice principals, 2019

	Guiding questions
Prelude	• Is there a particular pertinent theme that is important for us to discuss throughout the interview? • Basic info and work life: background, titles
The everyday	• Describe your everyday as a vice principal in relation to your collaboration with the middle managers (meetings, instructions, communication, tasks etc.)
Being a leader of middle managers	• How do you see the role of the middle managers in this school? • What are your explicit and implicit expectations of the middle managers? • Have there been any changes in these expectations? • In what ways have school management worked towards 'establishing' or facilitating the work of the middle managers? • What thoughts have you had in terms of being a leader of this particular group of employees? – Does it require anything different? • Who decides/defines the job description of the middle managers?
Being both a teacher and a middle manager	• In your opinion, what does it require to be both a middle manager and a colleague/teacher at the same time? • Being both can sometimes be challenging. Can you think of any examples of a situation where this has been so? • How did you as a school handle that situation? • How do you support the middle managers in navigating between being a teacher and a middle manager? • Are the middle managers a support to the school management?
Informal leaders	• Are middle managers leaders? Informally?
Future development	• Thought experiment: A neighbouring school is interested in developing the number and use of middle managers in order to improve, e.g., school efficiency. They want to invite you to talk about your experiences as a leader of middle managers and provide input to their process of

	enhancing their use of middle managers. What would your perspectives and advice be? • Top-five development goals for the use of middle management?
Closing	• Did we miss anything? • Did our conversation make you reflect on anything you want to add?

Interview guide – Focus Group, middle managers, 2018

Introduction

- Introduction to your position, overall responsibilities etc.

Theme: The everyday

Preamble: on post-its note down 1–2 examples of activities or tasks from your everyday work as a middle manager (use 1–2 min.)

- Share examples with the group
- Discuss/reflect on overall work activities and responsibilities – differences, alignment, other comments.

Exercise: articulations of middle management

Based on my fieldnotes and your reflection logs, I have noted down articulations describing what middle management entails locally at this school. Some articulations are direct quotes (yours or your colleagues'), others are my interpretation of observed events, your reflection logs etc.

- Alone, read through the articulations (placed on post-its on the table) and choose one (or two) articulation(s) that 'speaks to you' – either because you agree, disagree or get to think about a particular situation.
- After reading and having chosen an articulation, start sharing with the group when you feel ready.
- No specific turn-taking or order. Please co-reflect and comment on each other's chosen articulations, examples of situations when it feels natural.

Theme: middle management in education

If you were to invite your middle manager colleagues working at this school to a meeting, with only middle managers present, and the topic of the meeting was to discuss potentials and dilemmas of being a middle manager, what themes should be put on the meeting agenda?

- When discussing these themes, please expand on why you find them pertinent.

Exercise: the everyday in photos

You have all brought a photo, illustrating a typical aspect/event/situation concerning your middle-management work.

- Describe the content of your photos and how it relates to your everyday work to the group
- Discuss/reflect on your everyday work – situations, tensions, awareness, tasks, anecdotes, other

Theme: the middle manager and the organization

- Discuss how you individually understand your position within the organization (expectations, mission, tasks, responsibilities etc.)

Theme: collaborations with school management

- Discussions/reflections on experiences of enacting a dual role – being simultaneously a teacher and a middle manager
- Potentials, challenges, complexity?

Closing: New reflections?

- Alone, note down some of the thoughts that today's conversation has prompted.
- Share/discuss reflections
- Did we miss anything?
- Other comments?

Interview guide – Focus Group, middle managers and school management, 2018

Introduction

- Introduction to your position, overall responsibilities etc.

Prelude: pertinent themes

- Name 2–3 things (headlines) that you are currently thinking about in relation to the role of a middle manager (from your own perspective as a leader or as a middle manager)
- Discuss/reflect on each other's headlines?

Theme 1: the everyday

- Alone, make a prioritized list of what takes up most of your time in relation to middle management work or being a leader of middle management work.
- Share, discuss/reflect on each other's lists?

Exercise: articulations of middle management

Based on my fieldnotes and your reflection logs, I have noted down articulations describing what middle management entails locally at this school. Some articulations are direct quotes (yours or your colleagues'), others are my interpretations of observed events, your reflection logs etc.

- Alone, read through the articulations (placed on post-its on the table) and choose one (or two) articulation(s) that 'speaks to you' – either because you agree, disagree or get to think about a particular situation.
- After reading and having chosen an articulation, start sharing with the group when you feel ready.
- No specific turn-taking or order. Please co-reflect and comment on each other's chosen articulations, examples of situations when it feels natural.

Theme: the middle manager and the organization

- Discuss how you individually understand the position of middle manager in the organization (expectations, mission, tasks, responsibilities etc.)

<u>Exercise:</u>

If you were to plan a meeting comprising of middle managers and school management and the topic of the meeting was to discuss potentials and dilemmas of being a middle manager, what themes should be put on the meeting agenda?

- Alone, note 2–3 themes on a post-it.
- Share, discuss
- When discussing the themes, please expand on why you find them pertinent.

Theme: Vignette

This vignette was developed from data from a different case-school, based on my observations of the everyday work of middle managers. Thus, it is not a story from this school, but maybe you will recognize some of the perspectives and situations. Everything is of course anonymized.

- What does this depiction make you think of?
- Do you recognize the theme of the vignette?
- Does it say anything that is 'typical' of middle management work?

Closing: New reflections?

- Alone, note down some of the thoughts that today's conversation has prompted.
- Share/discuss reflections
- Did we miss anything?
- Other comments?

Interview guide – Focus Group, middle managers and teacher colleagues, 2019

Introduction:

- Basic info and work life: background, titles

Theme: teacher/middle manager collaborations

Prelude:

- Addressing teacher-colleagues: give a short introduction about the collaborations you have had with the middle managers throughout your time as a teacher at this school. What was the 'theme' of the collaboration?

Exercise:

Alone, in regard to your collaborations, reflect on some of the positive experiences you have had as a part of this collaboration.

Teachers: your 'take-home'

Middle managers: experiences of contributing positively to a colleague's teaching practice.

- Share, discuss
- Anything that surprised you in terms of each other's take-home?

Theme: Feedback and reflection

The focus for many of these collaborations seems to be related to the activity of co-reflecting practice, giving feedback and thereby developing teaching practices (with a co-practitioner: the middle manager).

- Alone, note down as many examples as possible of feedback that proved to be particularly meaningful, or provided a change
- Share/discuss, what made the particular session/collaboration meaningful/insightful etc.

Theme: Hopes and dreams

Based on the conversations you have had so far, develop a top-five list identifying elements that are important when collaborating.

- Why did you choose the things you did?

Closing: New reflections?

- Alone, note down some of the thoughts that today's conversation has prompted.
- Share/discuss reflections
- Did we miss anything?
- Other comments?

Appendix B. Participant log writings

Participant log writing – an example

1. Questions concerning everyday practices and work

A) **What tasks have I done/what activities have I taken part in relation to my middle management work this week**

B) **What are my thoughts of these tasks/activities?** (did they go well, why/why not? Did I manage to complete all? Why why/why not? etc.)

2. My own reflection questions (defined by the middle managers)

A) **How do I continue to experience the expectations from school management and my colleagues in relation to my work?**
Examples from my week:

B) **How can I best help my colleagues help students in need?**
Examples from my week:

3. Ad hoc themes
Themes that have preoccupied me throughout the week; relational, professional, personal etc.

4. Photo and photo text
Insert photo (or other image) from my week. Illustrating a topic, concern, something that has taken a lot of my attention, or something that has typified the week I have had.
Give my photo a headline and note down a few words of why and what this picture illustrates.

1

Appendix C. Vignette – Availability

As a middle manager, you are used in various ways. Sometimes this involves scheduled meetings, going over different test results or observations of colleagues' teaching. At other times, it involves being asked for advice about particular students or materials gone missing during lunch break, while getting coffee or while doing your own preparations. It can be difficult to say 'no' to a colleague who approaches you with a concern about a student. Middle manager, Iben, describes it this way: "*I get frustrated when I can't get around to doing all the tasks I want to do. I find it hard having to push a colleague's request for help aside. Maybe that is my own expectations talking.*"

As a middle manager, it is important to be of use to colleagues and therefore be available here-and-now, and preferably to avoid saying 'no'. Maybe this is because you can feel like needing to demonstrate your worth and that you are spending your given (middle-management) hours well.

Appendix D. Main categories Article Two

Empirical example	Main category	Components in code cluster
Well, of course it's nice to be of use. No doubt about that. But that's also why I go home if I need to correct some of my own pupils' papers, or do my own lesson planning, because it's only at home that I can sit undisturbed. Otherwise, it gets all muddy and I'm constantly interrupted. *(Interview, Lissy, 11.11.18)*	Seizing one's position	Performing availability Tropes-in-use Claiming space(s) Juxta-positionings of time(s)
Headmaster: The general idea is that you [ed. middle managers] always start with an observation. You should view this as a form of qualifying practice in terms of the work that you're about to set out to do with your colleagues. It's not like you don't ask your colleagues what <u>they</u> see or <u>their</u> concerns, but you need to enter that classroom on the basis of an observation, because you will most definitely see something else. For instance, you might notice something in regard to class dynamics. I would like for you to share and contribute what <u>you</u> see	Lending an eye	Challenging the status quo Co-practitioner Sharing leadership capacities Legitimacy

when you sit at the back of the room and use this to develop their practice. (Fieldnotes, workshop with middle managers and school management, 04.10.18)		
Elisabeth [ed. middle manager] continues to explain how she would approach such a matter: "particularly in those two classes you need to be extra alert", she says to her colleagues. *Reflexive notes: How does Lissy have such in-depth knowledge of the everyday humdrum activity concerning these two classes and the students? I once again start to reflect on how the middle managers continue to use their everyday knowledge to qualify their sessions with colleagues in the sense that they will comment on the implementation of a new programme with respect to individual students, or class dynamics. Either because they themselves have taught the students, or they have met them in the hallways. In some ways their 'expert' knowledge consists of embodied*	Knowledge-broker	Knowledge containers Multi-knowledge Channelling knowledge Connecting the dots

knowledge of the 'floor'. Expert knowledge is not only theories and books, but stories about students' backgrounds, particular needs or encounters on the playground, a bloody nose in 3rd grade etc. *(Fieldnotes, meeting between a middle manager and two colleagues regarding a coming intervention led by the middle manager, 07.09.18)*		
I think it's super interesting to think of that space, that field of tension, when you develop together. However, it's super important that you're aware of your roles, you know, because it can easily seem like you enter with a formal mandate and tell them to change. If I'm not aware of that space and change, then I'm no longer a help, but a stressful burden. *(Interview, middle manager, 09.11.18)*	Position-zapping	Transforming spaces Loyalties Transitions Relational work Switching

Appendix E. Main categories Article Three

Empirical example	Main category	Components in code cluster
The whole idea of me having some flexible hours in my schedule is that I'm able, when it makes sense, to pool my hours into one big intervention or session with a colleague. As a consequence, some weeks I work a lot and other weeks less. But it also means that I lose track of how much clock time I use on the different tasks. In reality, the hours I have in my schedule never match anyone else's schedule or match the time spent, so, well... yes. That's that. *(interview, middle manager, 21.11.2018)*	Hard times	Structures: bell, timetables etc. 'Organizationality': charts, job descriptions, meeting agendas etc. Linear times: Pool of hours, clocks
Ad hoc meeting with a teacher-colleague: *"Hey [ed. addressing the middle manager], when do you have time to go over those tests?" "Well, why don't we just do that right now!"* *I was almost out of the door, but it's better just to do it now. We sit down at a table in the lounge. I bring some coffee. I pull out the tests, so that we can look at them together. I have to explain some concerns, so I'm very aware of how I phrase things. I tell her that I think*	Soft time	Relationships; feelings of alliance Collegiality: coffee cups, Meaningful times: saying yes, flexibility etc.

it's a class with some issues and that's the reason for the test results... I feel the atmosphere is good, we joke. She also agrees with my concerns. *(Log writing, middle manager, week 45, 2018).*		
It's problematic that I don't have enough time for my middle-management work. Usually when I sit down to lunch there's a line forming as I eat. *(log writings, week 36, 2018)*	On the clock	Professional discourse: literacy-words, materials/academic books, school mantras etc. Interventions: eyes on practice, advice-giving etc. Structures: schemas, process plans, school policies etc.
I never sit in the office and work. When I need to get work done, I go home... I never do that because, if I do, then I'm no longer a colleague. Then that goes out the window. I am aware that I can use this collegiality somehow. At the same time, I never get drunk with my colleagues at parties. *(Interview, middle manager, 09.11.18)*	Of the clock	Private discourse: anecdotes, kid-stories etc. Collegiality: laughter, lunch packs, tensions/loaded room etc. Absences: wine, expertness etc.

  Picture of manuals created for the teaching staff by the middle manager put up in their common copy and preparation room (log writings, week 45, 2018)	Formal spaces	Physicality: meeting agendas, iPads, PowerPoint shows, labels in copy-room, posters etc. Body positionings: presenting, coordinating, leading Work flexibility: body presences mean availability, absence of formal office space
Well, what can I say? It was a rather loaded room – loaded with past experiences and such. When you've known each other for many years and worked together as colleagues and then I have to go into their domain as a middle manager, then, yes, I use my experiences with that person very much, in order not to challenge this 'alpha-she'. You read your colleagues. *(Focus group, middle managers, 13.11, 2018)*	Informal spaces	Teacher-ness: teaching experiences, books, struggles with copy-machine etc. Atmosphere: chit-chat, loud talk, laughter Attuning language: knowledge of colleagues utilized
Trine sits in the back, listening to a student presentation. She looks up at the teacher, her colleague. She continues to scan the room while the teacher is commenting on the presentation. I can see that	Insider	Bodily reactions: nods, smiles Professional (teaching) background: personal teaching experiences, teaching

she's taking a lot of notes. I notice that the teacher is tuning in to her notetaking as well. All of a sudden another student makes a joke – the teacher glances over at Trine, nodding her head and sends a 'secret' smile. Trine smiles back. It happens again when a student responds to q question prompted by the teacher. It's not super obvious. I wonder if the students notice the interaction. The teacher smiles at the student, gives feedback and looks back at Trine. *(Fieldnotes, observation of a middle manager's observation of her colleague's classroom teaching, 03.10.18)*		materials, recess duty, learning room decor etc. Bodily activity: 'we' discourse with teacher-colleagues, enhancing their teacher-ness at meetings (video), on breaks etc.
The teacher walks around and helps. Trine [ed. middle manager] sits at the back of the room. She scribbles down a few more notes. One student still has his hand up. The teacher is helping someone else. Trine looks at the student and he looks at her, signalling with his eyes that he could use some help. She stays seated – she seems to be struggling a bit – moves around in her seat. She gets up and walks over to a small group of students talking about the tasks they have to do. She listens attentively, doesn't interact. She looks over at the student who is sitting with his hand up once more.	Outsider	Bodily activity: meetings with school management, 'we' discourse with management, attendance at (costly) courses, fewer teaching hours (in classrooms) etc. Outsider 'signs': specialized books, school folders, tests etc. Autonomy: flexible schedules, influence/defining your own time

(Fieldnotes, observation of a middle manager's observation of her colleague's classroom teaching, 03.10.18)		