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Simulating resuscitation – material and social practices as mediators of knowledge and meaning.

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Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) courses teach the lay public a procedure intended to prevent death from sudden cardiac arrest. In these courses encounters with what might be a case of cardiac arrest and what one should do as a bystander is simulated. Knowledge is intended to provide hope. This presentation studies how the material and social practices that constitute the CPR class create a space for discussions and for experiencing what a real-life event of actually having to perform CPR would be like.

The study is based on material gathered through participatory observations, carried out in 2011/2012, during CPR classes in two different settings. It elaborates on how the material and social practices that constitute the CPR class work as mediators of knowledge and meaning.

During classes instructors and participants repeatedly return to how the real-life event might differ from the situation they enact during class. The practical exercises of chest compressions and mouth-to-mouth on mannequins engender lively discussions among participants. They wonder whether there is a risk of further damaging the victim when trying to help and if they themselves as rescuer really are strong enough to carry out the compressions. Experiencing the measures, chest compressions and mouth-to-mouth, with their own bodies is tiresome and participants sometimes complain about pain in their hands. The mannequin is occasionally treated as a living person gently approached and at other times made fun of, slapped in the face and confirmed dead by the participant. Self-doubt, worries, jokes, care and hope all converge.