Appearing pedagogy: from embodied learning and teaching to embodied pedagogy

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In this paper images are used to support the conceptualisation and recognition of embodied pedagogy. Analysis of data gathered during an arts-based teaching project in pre-service teacher education revealed the presence of an embodied pedagogy and supports the further deployment of embodied teaching and learning in teacher education. Embodied pedagogy includes embodied teaching and embodied learning but is conceptualised through ‘pedagogy as relational’ – between teaching and learning and between teacher and learner. Through image this paper presents traces of embodied pedagogy from the classroom. These tracings of embodied pedagogy in classrooms defy baseline certainty and instead assert Benjamin’s thesis that knowledge can only ‘stand up’ through multiplicity, through all acts of knowing.

Keywords: pedagogy; embodiment; teacher education

‘To read what was never written’. Such reading is the most ancient: reading before all languages, from the entrails, the stars, or dances. (Benjamin 1999, 722)

The authors of this paper are teacher educators and researchers and the tertiary classroom is the site of this research in embodied pedagogy. In the work of understanding pedagogy as a relational endeavour/practice we make it appear before others: to see it at work. In this paper embodied pedagogy is illustrated operating within learning spaces; lines of flight materialise in given moments (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 329) as the bodies of ‘teachers’ merge with/extend to ‘student’ bodies. A pedagogical unification is real and present, if only transient.

Over a three-year period 280 pre-service teachers participated in a core professional studies subject ‘curriculum and assessment’ through the

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construction of art about curriculum and assessment. This subject was taught across two sites, a university and a secondary school. This arts-based approach, theorised in other publications (Dixon and Senior, 2009), generated opportunities for students and the authors to engage with each other, with objects/artefacts, and opened up the possibilities of bodily engagement. As teacher educators we moved from the academic linguistic discourse of lecture – workshop and discussion mode – to teaching in embodied ways of art making in core theoretical courses (Senior and Dixon 2005; Dixon and Senior 2006).

Our research troubles the delineations between what can be seen, what is invisible and what is imagined and makes matter-energy (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 408) visible. We experience and draw upon this matter as teachers but have difficulty in speaking of its presence with our pre-service teachers or to those beyond the classroom. In this paper we illustrate through data and analysis representations of embodied pedagogical matter. The choice to work with and include images as data was driven by our research question:

- What does Aoki’s notion of the ‘indwelling midst’ (Pinar and Irwin 2005) of embodied teaching and learning look like?

Aoki (Pinar and Irwin 2005) and Ellsworth (1997, 2005) urge us to engage beyond commonplace understandings of ‘the relationship between’. We explore a pedagogy that may be ‘cemented deep in the nature of the relationship between’ (van Manen 1991, 31) self and Other. Ellsworth, in identifying the place of the unconscious in the pedagogical relationship, articulates the role of ‘asides, stand-in substitutions, denials, forgettings, prohibitions, feelings of fear, shame, pleasure’ (1997, 64). These involuntary, intuitive and affective responses to the unknown are the spectres or phantasmic traces of between that give shape to the abstract, formless or silent. Van Manen (1991), somewhat paradoxically, states that pedagogy cannot be found ‘in observational categories’ and yet pedagogy is felt by its presence in an encounter. Rather than being drawn into dualistic or Cartesian understandings of being, we find resonance in our joint experience as teachers and teacher educators with the tentative and speculative. Aoki’s notion of the ‘indwelling midst’ speaks to these spaces of ambivalence denoted by ‘presence/absence’ (Pinar and Irwin 2005, 426) in pedagogy. He understands this ‘no-thing’, not in the sense of lacking, negativity or suspended scepticism, but as one that is ‘pregnant with possibilities’ (2005, 426) and space. Between Ellsworth’s sensate murmurings and Aoki’s no-thing, our attention is drawn to the locations of teaching and learning and of pedagogy. We postulate the form and the function of that location as embodied pedagogy.
Visualising embodiment

Other research on embodiment which informs this conceptualisation of pedagogy has used the words of their participants as evidence of embodiment: field notes, writings and interviews (Macintyre Latta and Buck 2008). Still others raise various possibilities for evidence of connecting bodies in tertiary classrooms:

the body fragmented in affect . . . In gesture, in confession, in papers, in evaluations they deeply disturb any pretence of privacy of the body that teaches or learns. They are whispered in the break to me or to others, they are emailed in urgency. (Probyn 2004, 38)

Furthermore, Probyn herself observes a growing awareness of ‘facial ticks’ and body movements (2004, 38) as she articulates a bodily consciousness whilst teaching. Estola and Elbaz-Luwisch (2003) acknowledge embodiment through the written and spoken word of teacher body or student body. They call on the voices of the bodies in teacher narratives and also their own ‘embodied practices’ within teacher education practice. Their focus is upon the teacher’s body, their physical body and the physical work of teaching; how their body is seen by students and teachers’ consideration of students’ bodies. They suggest that control of the body is a significant factor in embodied pedagogy: ‘for experienced teachers, control of bodies may be implicit and seem almost ‘natural’’ (Estola and Elbaz-Luwisch 2003, 709). They speak of ‘relationships [which] are also embodied and teachers carefully read one another’s body messages’ (2003, 710). In this sense, the body gives messages to the other to form or position and this is understood in and also through the body: ‘I sensed it on my skin and saw it on their faces’ (2003, 710). In contrast, Moje (2000) views embodied relations as an aspect of discursive practice. She talks of embodied practices ‘such as dress, body image, and personal habits’ (2000, 34) and recognises an authority in the body: ‘our bodies spoke what our mouths refused to speak’ (2000, 35).

In a significant shift from this body of research, we chose images as a data source as the meaning in the image ‘produce(s) a story that we can identify not in terms of difference of the linguistic model – but through the combination of internal elements, and because of intertextual literacies that confirm for us, on the basis of experience, what they mean’ (Schirato and Webb 2004, 65). In other words, seeing is the involvement of reading with body and emotion, that is, reading with the whole body. It is more conventional to ‘read’ and present the ‘words’ of participants as evidence of pedagogy. However, to reduce discussion of embodied pedagogy to words alone will relegate such discussion of embodiment to the ‘third person’: description rather than inscription. Images, both ‘real’ and created/drawn provide sources of fecund data. We are capable of maintaining a ‘magical attitude’ (Mitchell 2005, 7), or imaginative state of awareness with images, while at
the same time a capacity to question their veracity, motives and value. Indeed, in image-based research there is considerable discussion around these issues (Moss 2008; Rose 2001; Schirato and Webb 2004; Stanczak 2007). The images provided the still moment not easily noticeable in the turbulence of the classroom. In focusing on image we sought to find what concepts of the body actually do in the classroom: ‘To create a map or an abstract diagram, sensation in the smallest interval must be watched in a pedagogic relationship’ (Roy 2003, 174). In the images, we discern pedagogical embodiments between the bodies ‘from where it is trapped, to trace lines of flight’ (Deleuze 1995, 141).

We have significant data sets including over 500 digital photographs, emails, student drawings and writings in journals. We take this opportunity to use a very selective process constrained by the limitations of publication and yet concerned to use image to trace smallest intervals of embodied pedagogy from this array of data. As part of the collaborative research process of this project, consent to use these images was obtained from the pre-service teachers, the secondary students and their guardians.

**Glances of pedagogy between bodies – indwelling midst**

Merleau Ponty’s phenomenological work (1962, 1968) offers an embodied approach to emotions – perception, emotion and lived experience are always embodied. For Merleau Ponty flesh is not an entity but a genesis, ripe with possibilities. In a metaphorical turn the flesh of the body is made of the same flesh of the world. Estola and Elbaz-Luwisch (2003) focus on the teaching body but they do recognise the body reaching beyond its apparent borders: ‘the body acting as an active and intentional reaching out from its physical existence’ (2003, 697). For Macintyre Latta and Buck (2008), the gap between student and teacher is ‘enfleshed’ through embodiment; however, they stop short of offering the embodied space as embodied pedagogy or of revealing the experience of embodiment.

The extension of the body is argued by Zembylas (2007) through a Deleuzian understanding of ‘energies’. He speaks of bodies and affects and also ‘energies that produce new affective and embodied connections’ (2007, 20). For Deleuze the physical extension of bodies in assemblages is embodied as ‘matter-energy’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 408). Zembylas offers possibilities through the recognition of Deleuzian ‘matter-energies’ in which bodies can be recognised reaching out and between in classroom assemblages. He then turns the focus through definition of ‘an embodied and affective pedagogy [which] is both a process and a product of particular teaching practices employed in the classroom and how these practices are realized as affects on and in teachers’ and students’ bodies’ (Zembylas 2007, 30–1). This affective (Deluze and Guattari 1987, xvii) encounter between bodies gives a shape to the pedagogical moment. In that shaping of
the ‘body-to-body pedagogy’, McWilliams (1996, 1999) asserts that our bodies, feelings, histories are as much pedagogical material as our minds. The ways we feel about each other, our relationships – physical, emotional, spiritual intellectual – are pedagogical material used in the processes of teaching and of learning and in the materialised pedagogical relationship.

We sharpen the focus on that space between/within assemblages of the materialised pedagogical relationship. In our research data, these ‘matter-energies’ are visible. In an engagement with materiality, the pedagogic relationship is ‘matter-energy’ that joins teacher and learner. It is this which is both experienced and palpable.

The literature on the pedagogical body discussed earlier reverts in unsatisfactory ways to body language, and to words about body language, and resorts to metaphorical abstractions. Turning instead to matter-energies, we consider the possibilities of an ethological reading which ‘highlights the importance of a micro analysis of movement gesture and behaviour in how bodies are connected’ (Zembylas 2007, 25). When faced with the complexity of the teaching and learning relationship, we are informed by Roy who argues that ‘sensation in the smallest interval must be watched in a pedagogic relationship’ (2003, 174). This practice compels us to leave the worlds of words. We bring our eyes to the very space around/between bodies; to one of the locations of a pedagogic relationship. Images capture these smallest intervals or moments and we are able to discern the embodied pedagogic moment.

**Marking contours of embodied pedagogy**

In the assemblage of data in this paper we strive to make connections across physical bodies, presences and affected bodies. We mark the lines and contours to illuminate embodied pedagogy. Mitchell (2005) contends that our responses to images provide the opportunity for a ‘double consciousness’ in which we may suspend ourselves in and amongst visual representations. We are capable of maintaining a ‘magical attitude’ (2005, 7), or imaginative state of awareness with images, while at the same time a capacity to question their veracity, motives and value. He warns against the destructive nature of iconoclastic practice in the analysis of imagery and, rather than getting caught up in what they mean, he suggests we ask what the images want. While we suspend our imaginative awareness and recognise that ‘every image is manipulated’ (Goldstein 2007, 79), the selection of our images is based upon our intent as researchers. We endeavour to elicit in the reader a response that ‘will be based on content, perception of intent and context’ (Goldstein 2007, 73). We give contour to ‘what happened’ in the classroom.

The images of ‘what happened’ were not time-lapse images, nor were they taken by one particular person or from any particular perspective. They
were taken at random by any of a number of the participants to record the teaching and learning experience. Images generated over the three-year life of this project that included more than one participant were included in the pool of images for the purpose of analysis. Individually the researchers engaged with all the images and recorded their readings in response to the research question. We drew ambient, reflected and radiant (Rodaway 1994) lines of flight upon each image, tracing the shape or contours of embodied pedagogy. A moderation process then followed. In considering the contoured images we put Mitchell’s (2005) suggestions for reading images to work: does this analysis allow us to maintain an imaginative state of awareness while at the same time a capacity to question their value and generative capacity?

The marked images were shared and discussed with groups of teacher educators, education researchers, pre-service teachers and practising teachers. For this publication we have made a purposive selection of images to facilitate the communication of what is generally understood as an abstraction. We chose a series of images involving the same participants, located in one site, and which illustrate the deepening of an embodied pedagogic relation (Figures 1–4). This particular series of images involved participants of the arts-based teacher education program located inside a secondary school in the third year of the study. The participants in this cohort included Year

Figure 1. Teacher and students on the courts.
Eight and Year Nine students (14 or 15 year olds), their classroom teachers and a number of pre-service teachers. In Figures 5–8 the images represented in Figures 1–4 are repeated with lines and contours of analysis.
At the extreme left of Figure 5 the teacher, Shayne, holds the students on the court. He anchors the pedagogical affect by encompassing the students watching the play on the far right. His pedagogic presence is reflected
in the line with the pre-service teacher. We have drawn ambient lines of pedagogic affect which invite student movement from the periphery.

In an initial reading of Figure 6, the student in the foreground would appear to have his back turned from Shayne. Drawing lines of reflection through, and off the image a mirroring is revealed as the student and the
teacher align their bodies to each other. The contour line traverses the shoulders of the three involved in this embodied moment and embrace all without privileging one over the other.

The contour lines in Figure 7 reveal the matter-energy of pedagogy around the students and Shayne as they work independently and yet together at the table. The radiating lines emanating from Shayne mark the direction of the movement of that matter-energy.

The repeated contours in Figure 8 indicate the thickening of the embodied pedagogic moment. Shayne holds more than one student in this embodiment. The straight line of Shayne’s presence holds Nathan (standing) and Alexander (seated) simultaneously. They know this affective presence.

**Embodied pedagogy**

In these images we see intricate relationships. We can ‘read’ before language, conversation and interactions in embodied ways. Tracing affective manifestations through the images provides evidence of matter-energies between bodies. We have moved into an area of ‘bodily between’ – the pedagogical relationship between self and other is not metaphorical. It is not only that the learning and teaching are bodily, but the form of the relationship is bodily. As the body of each extends past its apparent boundaries, these connections are felt by others, seen by others. In a tradition of connoisseurship (Eisner 1991), our ability to see and to read these physical connections is a learned one. These embodiments are not stable. They are fluid. They can be summoned but require the participation by both parties and the calling ‘to appear’ (Greene 1995, 44).
We offer an ethological reading of the ‘rickety space’ between self and other (Ellsworth 1997, 163). Through image, we have traced the form of pedagogic moments. In this paper, we have lingered over one moment, one image, one still at a time. Communicating this reading before language is a struggle that sometimes leaves those of us intimately involved speechless:

For is it not true that face to face with the primal mystery of Being, we are brought to an awareness that language which has served us well to describe the phenomena of the world begins to falter; at best, it merely points and then passes into silence. (Pinar and Irwin 2005, 400)

Our gaze registers the embodied nature of pedagogy. Deep in the forgotten and un-said we give word and image to embodied learning/teaching and pedagogy. We ‘read’ what is unwritten (Benjamin 1999, 722); an embodied pedagogy that crystallizes the relational ‘teacher’ and ‘student’ and refuses the distorted normalising gaze of teacher reflection and student observation. We hope that an awakening to embodied pedagogy may give rise to provoking and choreographing pedagogic moments by teachers and by students.

References


