

## **Effacement and Metaphor: Searching for the Body in Educational Discourse**

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*This essay concerns the body's positioning in discussions of teaching, specifically focusing on the authors' efforts to trace discursive invocations of teachers' bodies by students reflecting on the teaching vocation. The authors explore, through a series of intertwined autoethnographic narratives, the research process that led them through focus group data collection and analysis, to reflections on students' metaphorical use of the "teacher's body" in these focus groups, to (in light of feedback from anonymous reviewers) the role of the authors' own teachers' bodies in constituting this research and its implications.*



Which narrators are privileged within current educational practices, and what are the consequences of casting students as “characters” in the instructor’s story rather than as full narrative agents in their own learning processes? How might the performative competence with which students tell stories in social interactions be used to facilitate their articulation of theoretical “stories” within classroom contexts? (Pineau, “Teaching” 26)

This is a story of evolving research with teaching, narrative, and the body in the classroom. Our project began with an effort to engage in dialogue with students who show an interest in the teaching vocation. We, the authors, are interested in what might draw a person to a life in teaching or,

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conversely, turn away a person who has considered teaching; we are also interested in performative pedagogy, critical pedagogy and dialogic education. In one sense, we wanted to learn about how and why a person living within classroom spaces might choose to imaginatively and/or literally take on, inhabit, desire (or perhaps be repulsed by) the body of “teacher”: a body whose movement through those classroom spaces is so acutely marked by complex circulations of institutional, cultural and personal power.

We developed this study to explore some of these questions by talking with prospective teachers who were currently university students taking communication courses centered on education; many of their responses appear below. Yet the teacherly body remained elusive, resisting our efforts to trace it through the language and metaphor of participants’ responses. The present essay is founded on a previous one, which included these same research questions, but is almost entirely revised in terms of methodology. What survives is a series of four tropes or themes that were originally developed by our analysis of students’ communication about the teaching profession. These tropes serve as germinal points of reflection for a series of four autoethnographic narratives through which we renew our search for the teacherly body. They are: (1) Being “called” to teach by a non-specific force that originates in one’s varied educational experiences, and responding to that call by choosing to teach; (2) Being “moved” to teach through the momentum provided by a specific other person (or group of people), often a mentor or an admired teacher; (3) Choosing, through teaching, to provide momentum for others, a source of energy, influence, and/or inspiration for others’ movement; and (4) Choosing, through teaching, to attend more carefully to the mutual push and pull of forces of momentum circulating among people engaged in social relationships such as education. Woven throughout this essay is our discussion of how we elicited participants’ responses, how we arrived at these four tropes through analysis of participants’ responses, and how our project has led us to explore these tropes through autoethnography. To help establish our perspective as scholars and teachers, however, we will begin directly with the first trope, including participant responses and an autoethnographic reflection.

### **One: Responding to a Call**

I don’t know, because I’m not a teacher, but I think that some teachers actually have a calling. They have a specific moment in their lives where it’s like, “wow, I’m gonna teach people what I know.” I would define

calling as a specific moment of clarity in one's life, where they realize the potential they have in teaching. (June-June)

One of the things that is kinda holding me back is that all of the teachers I have had and enjoyed—they love what they are doing. They get all excited. I love what I am doing, but I don't know if I would love teaching it. [. . .] I don't know if I would have that passion. (Lillian)

I'm drawn to [teaching]. (Vi)

When I was drawn to teaching, it was in high school. (Marissa)

A calling...I really like the idea of reaching out. (Malachi)

We student-teachers sit in a circle, with our legs crossed, “toy” instruments of different kinds in front of us: a plastic tambourine, sets of spoons with various combinations of surfaces (wood, metal, plastic) to strike them on, a couple of kazoos, and so on. All twenty-three people in the room will be called upon to make music during this performance, because even those of us with no instruments will clap and use our voices to join in, at the performer Hector's request.

But will we respond to Hector's call? Will we answer the invitation to make music with him? Will our music open up new paths, allowing us to teach ourselves about his chosen text? I have my doubts; I do not encounter this performer as a “pied piper.” None of his requests are clearly structured, and this performance seems, from each of my multiple vantage points as participant, instructor, and evaluator, to be chaotic, cacophonous, perhaps not music at all. I feel rocked, but not ready to dance, certainly not to celebrate.

Hector's assignment in *Oral Interpretation of Children's Literature* is to perform a selection of children's poetry. He is working with a poem about making music from household items, and many of his performance choices do, indeed, move me: The circle invokes drum circles. Our bodies, in making the circle, recreate the shapes of the bodies of many of the “toy” instruments, from spoon to tambourine to handbell. Our relation to one another highlights the loop of oral/aural connection at the heart of his poem.

Yet the feel of cacophony doesn't subside, but rises and swells instead: Hector doesn't know his lines, nor where he plans to move next, nor when to cue us to play with our “toys.” He is embracing, today, an approach to this assignment that is consonant with his approaches each day in class:

detached, low-energy, imprecise in his gestures and in the use of his voice, slack in posture and uncommitted in stride.

But will we respond to the call anyway? The “toy” instruments, argues the poem, argues Hector in this performance even through its very cacophony, are not toys at all. They immerse us all in a world of sound creation and sound perception; the air vibrates no less intensely because these instruments are found objects and items sold to kids, and it vibrates no less intensely in cacophony than in symphony. Is it intensity that I yearn for in Hector’s performance? Will I evaluate him more favorably, cacophony or not, crispness or not, if I feel a heightened intensity in his embodiment of the prose piece he will work with for his next assignment? I admit to myself how complicated I find the effort to answer the question his performance evokes: Can a low-intensity performance be rigorous?

Questions of rigor and intensity flow from Hector’s embodiment of music, for me, because Hector has marked himself—by being in this classroom, by his responses to questions I’ve put to students weeks ago—as someone who would like to teach at the elementary level. He is working toward a Bachelor’s degree in Liberal Studies, with future plans to enter the Teacher Education Program and complete a Multiple Subjects Credential: hence, the catalogue-specified benefits for him of a course in Oral Interpretation of Children’s Literature. In teaching this course, I meet seventy-five student-teachers each academic year. I witness four formal performances for each student. Three hundred times a year bodies move through the classroom; three hundred times a year bodies struggle to embrace, or resist, the literature that calls upon them. Three hundred times a year these teachers-to-be answer the call of the text by risking public performances for graded evaluation. The performances accumulate, and their collective weight is a complicated text that calls upon me, that asks me to recall what they have taught me. One thing these performances have taught me is influencing my response today, inside this circle: that rigor in academic performance is linked, however messily, however cacophonously, with focus and intensity, with desire and commitment.

Will we respond to this call? In every new class, performers/student-teachers continue to challenge and respecify, through their embodied work, what kinds of choices I read as “focused,” “intense,” “desiring,” “committed.” I’m not convinced, here in the circle, that Hector is answering, or indeed that any of us in our spoon-slapping or kazoo-humming is answering, either. The performance falls flat because, whatever its intensity, it does not engage in a meaningful, challenging way the questions raised by the assignment, the course or our class discussions.

Yet Freire calls upon us to provide students with resources to grapple with their own lives, rather than merely to reproduce with students our vision of the world (*Oppressed*). I do experience this performer, and all of us in the circle, as grappling with one question about the future: How do we engage young people, and ourselves, with the sheer joy of sound creation even when we begin from a low-intensity, out-of-focus place? Why might Hector engage this assignment from such a place? Do the violences in his own life (a few of which he has subtly alluded to in previous conversation) themselves curtail opportunities for intense, deeply felt responses? I'm not sure; I'm not sure in this performance where the rub between (productive) resistance and (dismissive) refusal lies. I know the danger, from a critical pedagogy standpoint, is in assuming that my own hearing that rub is what matters, rather than Hector's hearing it for himself.

Here, within the circle Hector has defined for us in this performance, the sound of the call upon us to teach is out of tune for me, knocked out of phase by the unconventional rhythms of the performer, by the broken rhythms of his forgotten lines of poetry, by the laid-back thrumming of his slouched body and narrowed eyes as he sits in his desk on every other class day. His performance leaves me asking: What does he hear in the sounds we create today? What does he hear in the voices of the students he imagines himself making music with in future classrooms? How, from his body that I read as low-intensity and out-of-focus, does he feel called to move, to respond, to teach?



We did not begin this way. We began by asking: What might be a fruitful way to explore, with students, questions related to teaching as a prospective vocational path? “Focus groups! Of course!” Focus groups seemed a reasonable approach; after all, focus groups are an established research method, are dialogic, and have the potential to foreground (some of) the voices of participants in complex ways. Indeed, we conducted a series of four focus group interviews with students recruited from upper-division classes in both instructional and applied communication. We not only hoped to understand more fully why these students choose or refuse the teaching profession, but also to elicit specific examples of how their language serves to maintain and challenge their own choices. Each question probed for participant perspectives along two key issues: (1) the purpose, function and value of teaching as a profession, and (2) individual choices to become teachers (or to not become teachers) and the reasons behind (and

language used to communicate) those choices. For example, questions included:

- What does it mean to be a teacher?
- How did you come to be interested in teaching? Who/what influenced that interest?
- If you knew a friend or sibling was interested in becoming a teacher, what would you say to her/him and why?

Participants chose pseudonyms for themselves and consented to our audiotaping and transcribing the interviews.

In generating categories to analyze our coded focus group data, we used Johnson's work on the human body and its movement through the world as an initial ground for linguistic metaphors. We found students' comments patterned by metaphors of direction, force and momentum, and discussed how these patterns might inform further research on the physical body and its relationship to classroom spaces and the recruitment and education of future teachers. Tracing the metaphoric dimensions of participants' talk was one way of joining Pineau's search for a "connection between performance and educational research [that] can be found in studies of generative metaphors that teachers use in talking about their theory and practice" ("Teaching" 25).

This approach to communication analysis was a good fit, we reasoned, for our effort to locate the lived body within the murky network of vocational paths that lead (or not) a person to teaching. What we found, in the course of developing, revising and rethinking this project, with the help of editors, reviewers and colleagues, is that the body we were searching for in educational spaces—the body of the "teacher" as conceptualized by these university students—remained elusive, especially *as* a body. Despite our attention to the body as languaged in students' metaphor-laced talk, we found ourselves moving further and further away from the kinds of questions that originally inspired our research: How do prospective teachers find teaching—appealing? A viable vocational choice? A choice that affects their desires in and out of the classroom?

We have pursued some possible answers to these questions by recasting our focus group analysis: Rather than settling on analytic themes as "outcomes" in our research, we use these same themes as generative foundations for autoethnographic theorizing of classroom interactions with other students in similar pedagogy-centered courses. In these autoethnographic reflections we make a small, but we believe significant, linguistic move in the interest of locating dialogic opportunities within our

narration of experiences with others: We adopt the phrase “student–teacher” from Freire, who developed two paired terms, “student–teachers” and “teacher–students,” in order to enfold within these terms the (ideally) dialogic orientation of pedagogical relationships and to challenge the polarizing effect of the solitary, monologic terms “student” and “teacher” scholars and laypeople alike use to discuss this relationship (*Oppressed*). In keeping with the goals of this project, all of the responses in this essay involve relationships directly centered on teaching as a subject matter: We recruited focus group participants from courses about pedagogy, and all of the pedagogical interactions in the autoethnographic narratives occurred in these types of classes as well. Because both students and the “teacher–narrators” in the remainder of this essay are engaged in the study of the pedagogical relationship, and because we want our terminology to reflect our commitments to learning from students as well as ourselves about the teacherly body, we will refer to all people in the narratives as “student–teachers,” Freire’s term for the people in the pedagogical relationship who are involved in thematizing and reconsidering the life–world through academic learning. We do not intend to elide the power positions held by the “teacher–narrators” by adopting the term “student–teacher,” but instead to foreground the unstable knowledge systems regarding the teacherly body and the relative balance of expertise (at least within these narratives) with respect to what people in the classroom “know” about the act of teaching.

## **Two: Being moved by another**

So, in first grade I had, like, my favorite teacher way back then, Ms. McAuliffe, and ever since then, I always thought it would be something that would be fun to do. [ . . . ] In high school I also had a couple really outstanding teachers. I’ve also had teachers that people labeled as, like, bad, but I could never really say that I’ve had a bad teacher, and I think that’s interesting. That kind of led me in that direction. (Stacy)

I was just put in the role and told, “You are going to be great at this.” I had a mentor teacher whose position I was replacing, and she said to me, “How did you know how to do that—that is a really great idea, I’ve never thought of that.” (Dee–Dee)

People come to me and say “you’d be a good teacher.” I didn’t even start thinking about myself as a teacher until people started sending that information to me. (Vi)

I'm not pursuing my teaching credential right now, but the first time I felt that I could be a teacher was in fifth grade when I had a male teacher for the first time. (Don)

I remember the exact moment when I decided I wanted to be [a teacher]. In the third grade, I was sitting in class and I was helping another student and we got back to the whole class discussing something, and a lot of the kids weren't understanding something. So then I raised my hand and I kind of explained it in little kid words, and then everyone got it. Sister X, my teacher, she looked at me and said "you should be a teacher." (Darien)

Location One: Thirty-three student-teacher are in the classroom today; one is a scholar from an organization that researches collaborative learning methods and their effectiveness in diverse classrooms. She is observing a class meeting of Communication in the Classroom. She and I have talked about performative pedagogy before, and she has told me that, though she finds it an interesting method, she has no experience with it at all. I am still surprised by conversations like these, especially with people, like this scholar, for whom pedagogy is a lifelong vocation. She has told me how excited she will be to observe a performance activity in a college classroom, and so I feel moved by her, pushed to develop something she will find meaningful.

Our topic today is "listening," and I have planned an activity based loosely on Boal's Forum Theatre method. Each student-teacher will start by working independently, writing through her/his experience with one classroom situation in which unsuccessful approaches to listening hindered learning. Next, I will assign groups who will work together to discuss their narratives, selecting one narrative to use as a foundation for a group performance of "an unsuccessful listening situation in our classroom lives." We will then re-perform the situation several times, with student-teachers opting in as characters in the performance so that they can rehearse new approaches and responses to one another.

The observer is not moved to participate in our activity. Instead, she stays in her seat through all phases of the activity, taking careful notes, her eyes and hands the only parts of her body obviously moving. Afterward, she tells me how impressed she is with performance, how little she knows about this or similar approaches, and how valuable she believes it could be for her colleagues studying pedagogical methods. I hope that our class has moved her to explore performance more. She promises to follow up with



me, but over the course of time our contact slowly dwindles; she and I have not been moved to email or call.

Location Two: I discuss the visiting scholar and her observation of our classroom with two tenured departmental colleagues. Both of them express interest in performative pedagogy and how it might affect their own classrooms, and the three of us have a lively, animated conversation about performance and pedagogy. I invite both of them to our classrooms to participate, and each of them says they would like to come. They have never done so.

As I move further and further along the path toward tenure and promotion, I am told by several colleagues that I should have tenured faculty in the department visit the classes I teach and write letters about what happens there, especially because I emphasize pedagogy in my research and because I am the only faculty member in the department who uses performance methods in the classroom. I keep meaning to make time for these visits and time for these invitations, but I have not been moved to do either.

Location Three: I work on a project with another colleague from the same organization: We plan an entire day of activities together for student-teachers from Thailand. I design an activity based on performance and the body in the classroom. My co-presenter echoes her colleague's sense of the value of performance and how much it might add to their organization's work on collaborative learning.

However, I worry because these activities do not work in any of the ways I had hoped: I struggle mightily to help the Thai student-teachers make sense of my requests for them to embody, in group-generated performances, the themes they are discussing. But the groups remain in their seats for the duration of our scheduled time, with one or two group members at a time moving only to lend their English language translation skills to friends at other tables. My own frenetic wheeling from table to table evokes no obvious movement in kind from participants.

During the activity, my colleague is not moved to participate. Instead, she wanders from group to group, sometimes listening to the student-teachers' ideas and offering some cultural translation, sometimes drifting toward her laptop and taking an interest in her presentation materials. Afterward, she again emphasizes how much she wants to explore performance, and we promise to keep talking about these ideas. Again I hope that our community has moved her to explore performance more. Again our contact slowly dwindles over the course of time; we have not been moved to email or call each other.

One way to understand this (lack of) movement amidst performative pedagogical contexts is to consider the weight of educational histories affecting all student–teachers in these situations. Despite verbal performances that (seem to) embrace the role of the body in learning, even seasoned, compassionate educator–actors are likely to reproduce in day–to–day interactions the habits of body and mind endemic to most of our educational spaces—specifically, the habits associated with “banking education” as named by Freire (*Oppressed*). Hamera, discussing the pedagogical bodies identified by her students, observes that “the body constructed by [banking] pedagogy, like the mind and the socius, is a disciplined and passive receptacle, meriting little in terms of comfort. This is the domesticated body my students routinely describe in their ethnographic exercises” (74). She suggests, in light of the pervasiveness of this pedagogical body, that we might characterize the movement inspired by encounters with performance in the classroom by gradual rather than sweeping transformations: “I argue that the efficacy of pedagogy, while sometimes ‘epiphanal,’ is more often incremental and [. . .] reverberates across time. The repetition of the conventional pedagogical body in bad faith through performance may be more of an evolutionary exercise in embodied pedagogy than a revolutionary one” (77).

What is it about performance? What is it in performances? What is it about performance generally—when performance is “about” in the sense of “surrounding”—that moves many student–teachers to curiosity, to considering how the body moves in and through the classroom? What is it in particular performances—when performances are “in” us in the sense of flowing through our bodies in relation to one another, to the classroom space, to the concepts in play in the pedagogical moment—that moves some student–teachers to reimagine these relationships in a potentially radical (even if gradual) way? Through what moments does a student–teacher’s response to the call of performance become a movement toward performative engagement with learning and teaching?



Answering these questions involves attending to participants not only as “informants” but, more importantly, as narrators of stories of teaching—which is a potentially meaningful turn, given Pineau’s question in the epigraph about “students’ [. . .] stories in social interactions be[ing] used to facilitate their articulation of theoretical ‘stories’ within classroom contexts” (“Teaching” 26). Our initial essay included a review of literature on

narrative theory, which was a foundation that helped us to make sense of focus group participants' storying of their educational experiences and how they have shaped participants' conception of teaching as a vocational possibility; as Fisher notes, narratives are the scaffolds on which we collaboratively build our conceptions of possibility (171). However, the most significant transformation in our project is our struggle to trust more deeply in narrative, in the process of storying the focus group experience and our responses to it rather than "analyzing" these in the traditional sense. We do not intend by this to advocate a dichotomy between "analytic" and "narrative" qualitative methods; on the contrary, this evolving project has helped us more fully understand Denzin's claim that "the interview is a way of writing the world, of bringing the world into play" (80). We hope, through creating autoethnographic responses to participants' own interview dialogue, to bring a co-created perspective on the world of teaching more fully into play—specifically by bringing the lived body more fully into play.

This is far from an unproblematic task to undertake in a (multiply) written essay, co-authored not by all participants but by only two, two professors who have already sculpted our bodies (and had our bodies sculpted) through embracing the desire to teach. Though we are always already removed, as listeners, speakers, and writers, from the sources of our desire and repulsion, stories like those in this essay are epistemological pathways through which we can not quite retrace our steps, but in fact create fresh connections between those things that have helped make us who we are—in a sense, locating our own bodies, an excellent place to begin the search for "bodies in the classroom" more generally. Langellier and Peterson emphasize the epistemological significance not only of stories themselves, but also of the particular bodies and locations (physically and temporally) of people telling and listening to stories: "Performing narrative is the site of interpersonal contact; [. . .] at the same time, performing narrative is a site of *intrapersonal* contact. The storyteller [. . .] is the narrator of herself as a character" (12). Our search for the performing body of the teacher has led us, from focus groups through theory to autoethnography—an attempt to write our own bodies into our project.

### **Three: Supporting the movements of others**

I think teachers are basically there for inspiration and motivation for students. (Kaye)

[Being a teacher means...] sparking the imagination. (Athena)

It is neat to see when the light bulb goes on and you get to say YES!  
And then you can go yes, yes, yes, keep going, you can go further.  
(Lillian)

Teachers are very influential. (Malachi)

Being a teacher is being a guide. (Elena)

I think [a teacher is] someone who inspires you and can, like, pull out things like qualities that you may not know and make you learn more about yourself. (Darien)

You know it's that look in their eyes, when you suddenly realize that they got it, they got something! And all of a sudden, they get that look of wonderment at the possibilities. (Vi)

As I enter the classroom, Olivia is talking to two people in the class whom she knows well and sits near. The three of them are discussing Olivia's research presentation, scheduled for today. She tells her colleagues over and over how anxious she feels about speaking in front of the entire class. When she sees me, she asks if she can skip her presentation. At first, her request seems playful to me; she speaks quickly, with a smile, and her friends smile with her. I try to respond with both playfulness and support, telling Olivia how good she'll feel after she finishes this assignment, and how soon that will be. She asks twice more for my permission not to speak, and each time the tone of her phrases is reframed by more pleading diction. Her eyes get a bit wider, her face a bit more flushed, and her body flutters in more agitated motion with each plea.

I feel caught in this moment among several conflicting calls for response, calls woven tightly together by the threads of my concerns and Olivia's. I believe in the process inherent in communication, and so I want Olivia to present not only because it is "fair" to ask this of each person in the class but because I believe that through re-presenting research both the researcher and her colleagues will learn differently, learn more, about her site. In short, I believe research presentations, as modes of performative knowing, are powerful. Yet I hear the invocation of power in Olivia's plea: She responds each time with direct requests not for understanding or for respecified expectations (though I hear some trace of these), but for permission.

Can I grant another person permission to be silent? Does Olivia need my permission to refuse this particular mode of performance, here today?

I'm not certain I can give what she is asking. What can I give? I have often felt, in other performance situations in classes, the vital importance of student–teachers giving energy to one another, and being willing to give that energy without strings attached, knowing that we must forego control of how we and others use that energy—or at least be willing to engage in negotiations of class energies, as Alexander explains:

The classroom is a space of social and political negotiation, a tensive site with competing intentions. These competing intentions are not about the perceived benefits of education (i.e., jobs, employment, self–elevation, self–actualization, and so forth). These intentions focus on the performative processes of education and the struggle of teachers and students to either gain or retain the authority of their own understandings as imbued by, with, and through different cultural insights and experiences. (59)

I feel the call to provide inspiration for anyone I ask to perform. I ask for performances knowing that performers will bring a wide range of chaotic energies to the classroom situation, and that I will need to consistently give my own energy to them, trying to provide a stable foundation.

I'm not certain I can give what Olivia is asking for, but I am moved to offer her something. I keep smiling, and tell Olivia that I'm confident she is ready and will do well; I remind her how important everyone's presentation is. She doesn't seem convinced, and I don't convince myself, either. She asks if she can present now, several minutes before class is scheduled to begin, while there are only a few students present. I respond again by telling Olivia how valuable I believe her observations will be to all the other class members. She is now visibly trembling. I'm not sure that presenting is the best thing for her to do; this is far from the “riskiest” assignment I have given, this “traditional” research talk, but here and now Olivia lets me know quite clearly that, for her, it is all she can (barely) manage at this point. The hour arrives for class to formally begin, and our established class processes unfold as usual: We set a speaking order for the day, and what we give Olivia, after she complies by raising her hand in response to my question to the whole class, is third position on the list.

Olivia does choose to present, and her work is exceptional. She is well–prepared for the traditional public speaking situation, standing alertly behind the podium, holding her eye contact with each section of the audience for just the right amount of time, with brief glances to her note cards cuing her rehearsed transitions and signposts. She even makes effective use of some humor to develop and sustain rapport with her audience. Despite Olivia's commitment to each previous class assignment, I

find myself surprised by how successful she is, in light of her protests beforehand. I start to wonder if her pleas were a way for Olivia to kindle, acutely focus, and draw upon my energy as a resource for her. This energy is something I would gladly give, but I could not have predicted before today that she—or any speaker—would draw upon it in this way.

After each presentation, we typically have a question-and-answer session involving the experiences each researcher reported from her/his classroom observations; discussion has never included comments about presentational choices or responses to the presentation's effectiveness—until Olivia's presentation. After the discussion about her observations draws to a close, I ask the class to comment specifically on any choices Olivia made as a presenter that they thought worked well, and to talk about why these were successful. I extend this use of my professorial power by asking Olivia's two friends not to join in the discussion, because I suspect that this choice will enhance Olivia's trust in the honesty of feedback from class members she knows less well.

The other student-teachers do, in fact, give Olivia the energy I trusted they would. Several class members offer elegant, persuasive, specific remarks about her strong presentational choices. This discussion inspires me in turn, gives me energy that sustains me as I grapple with the decision to ask Olivia and others to put their bodies on the line repeatedly, even with seemingly simple assignments like this. Olivia appears a little embarrassed about the individual attention, but also satisfied with what she has accomplished. I trust that the kind of spark she gives to us, and that her audience gives back to her, will reward the risk.

Perhaps in her case it has: On the day of her second research presentation, later in the same semester, Olivia expresses similar doubts about her readiness to speak. This time, her protests seem half-hearted relative to the first day, her vocal tone steadier, her eye contact with me calm and confident compared with the pleading expressiveness of before. In some ways, her presentation has less vigor and precision than last time, but one moment in particular stands out: After starting out behind the podium, which rests atop a rectangular table, Olivia steps to the side, slowly moves forward along the short side of the table, and—for the last several minutes of her presentation—takes ownership, with her confidently moving body, of the performance space at the front of the rows of desks. She strides rhythmically back and forth along the front, long edge of the table, expanding her gestures and narrowing both the physical and the expressive distance between herself and her classmates.

Pineau maintains that “each time that a student explores her or his presentation of self [. . .] educators find further evidence that when students engage their physical bodies they ‘come to know’ things in a uniquely personal and heuristic manner” (“Critical” 50). Finding evidence for this sort of “coming to know” in her newest presentation, I again highlight Olivia’s choices afterward, using them to initiate conversation about our bodies in the classroom space. But I hope that our class discussion highlights something more, something Pineau’s observation captures: the steadily building process at the heart of learning through performance, and the constant renewal of energy that student–teachers must find if we are to sustain, and trust in, this process.



Our work is informed by two related challenges from performance studies scholarship. The first is encapsulated in Pineau’s concern, again from the epigraph, regarding students serving as “characters” rather than “narrators” in teachers’ autoethnographic narratives (“Teaching” 26). The second is Gingrich–Philbrook’s discussion, following Hantzis, of research methods such as autoethnography that may involve the turn toward the self and away from the other:

Performance studies has long considered performance and personal composition to have a pedagogical component for the performing writer. [. . .] To have genuine value for either performer or audience, performers who view their work as autoethnography (and vice versa) must generate encounters with the unforeseen (Blau), not merely the prefigured (304-5).

Students from the focus groups and students from our classes (as well as other teachers) are indeed characters in these autoethnographic narratives, narratives told from the point of view of a teacher in each case. Our hope is that the narratives function for readers, as they do for us, as one way of encountering the unforeseen, specifically the (for us) heretofore unforeseen bodies of students *as* prospective teachers, engaging pedagogical spaces not only in and through the student role but quite consciously and deliberately in and through roles such as “would-be teacher” and “won’t-be teacher.” We adopt a responsive, interrogative narrative posture in order to consider the questions about teaching that we believe have been posed to us—posed both formally, in focus group discussions, and informally, in pedagogical interactions (following the example, in the latter case, of Alexander, Pineau,

Warren and other scholars who partly ground their writing in pedagogical interactions).

#### **Four: Moving with others**

[Being a teacher means...] giving the students a piece of yourself and learning what they know, 'cause it works both ways. Giving 100% of yourself. (Vivian)

When you're a teacher, you not only have your own life to think of, you have at least 30 kids. If you're in the public school system, possibly more. Just to have that responsibility of all these people's lives depending on me in a time where I could be panicking is just kind of a little too much for me. (Natalie)

I think I can fall back on some of the critical comments, the feedback I've received from some of my professors in college. They got me thinking about what was important to me, what my passions were, and how I wanted to help people find their voice. (Vi)

Some teachers that get burned out...look at their job of teaching as a job, not as an opportunity. When I say opportunity, I mean opportunity to pass on what you've learned to help students become thinkers vs., "ok, yeah, this is my 9-5, this is what I do. When I'm done, I go home, that's the end of the story." They don't think about the kids after they went home. They really try to separate themselves from the job. (June-June)

The part of my job that I can least separate myself from: the chance to explore pedagogical questions with a group of people who are also interested in teaching. Today, though people are at work on these questions, the classroom is silent, befitting the traditional written test-taking we are doing. But I can't write "we" in good conscience, because although I have brought other grading to do here, I am the only person in the room not hunched over in intense focus on the paper in front of me for long stretches of time. I know I'm all alone in this way because I have the privileged vantage point of "proctor" that allows me to bear sustained witness to others' test-taking performances here. Yet the inferences I draw from this role as observer do not serve me as well as I hope; after fifty minutes have already elapsed and only twenty-five remain, I finally notice that part of the group performance I am witnessing is not just about intensity, but a bit of panic. At last I interrupt and ask how many people



have completed four of the five questions; of the twenty-three people in the room, only a few raise their hands. Worried, I ask how many have completed three questions; less than half the class members raise their hands. I'm not alone anymore: I feel a sense of panic creep along my own back and arms now.

I try to make the "responsive teacher" move, suggesting that test-takers complete only the first three questions and let me work out the math in an equitable way. One person suggests that the rule be "choose three out of five" because not everyone has been working on the questions consecutively, and I agree. An audible sigh of relief and a visible slackening of tension sweeps the room; the panic in my own body starts to subside, and I turn back to my grading, disappointed in my effort to gauge question lengths but confident that a class-wide crisis of confidence has been averted. However, no matter how often or how casually I gaze across the room, one person's performance of panic does not subside: Helen.

Helen is easy to spot because today, for the first time this semester, she has left the seat she always chooses and works on her test at a table against the back wall. She is an avid participant in class and most days she calls on me to directly attend to her; today she looks extremely discouraged, even desperate—certainly not inspired. Her face is reddened, her shoulders arch forward rigidly, her pencil trembles in her white-knuckled hands. I hope I'm reading this wrong, but when Helen brings her test to the front, her performance subtly rotates into anger: Her eyes hold mine hard, demanding an accounting. I speak first, asking a question that sounds ludicrous as soon as it reaches the air: "How did you feel about the test?" Helen's voice shakes like her hands, not with fear (I think) but with frustration as she tells me how much more difficult she found this test than our previous one, how unfair she believes it is, and how poor she expects her grade to be. I do my best to acknowledge Helen's concerns, and I promise to be both a compassionate grader and a responsive giver of feedback, assuring her that I will take her and others' experiences of the test seriously. It all comes out hollow even to my ears, and Helen storms out of the room.

This test-taking scene, in retrospect, provides a test for me as well, one I'll need to retake in future semesters: I expected people to analyze and interpret classroom communication texts in their essay responses, but my own initial analysis and interpretation of Helen's performance fell, it turns out, short of the mark. Several minutes before the start of the next class meeting, Helen and I each arrive in the classroom looking for each other, and have an extensive conversation about the test, its questions, the chosen classroom communication texts, test-taking apprehension, and so on.

Dialogue is in play, I think, moving both of us toward a more complex understanding of the classroom—again, the reason I love working with would-be teachers. However, just as I expect our conversation to wind down, Helen identifies what was, for her, at the heart of her anxiety on that second exam: my teacherly body. She explains that many of the fears structuring both her oral presentations (she was unhappy with the outcome of her previous one) and her test responses stemmed from how I project apparently seamless expertise, authority and confidence in the classroom; she claims that the “ideas just roll off your tongue so effortlessly.” She tells me that she cannot envision herself becoming this, and it is leading her to question not only her work as a student but her plans to teach as well. She tells me she respected my openness to feedback and flexibility with the test requirements, and that she feels better after talking with me about how she feels; she returns to her seat, starts talking with a classmate, and moments later our full-class conversation about the test begins.

This is the strongest, most urgent call for movement I have ever heard as a teacher, for reasons ranging from my own desire to create spaces for dialogue that question teacherly authority (following Shor) to my recognition of the often invisible (to me) privileges accorded me as a white, male teacher to the responsibility I feel—as someone who studies performance in the classroom—to highlight the constitutive nature of all pedagogical communication, expert or otherwise. Yet here we are, at the end of the semester, nothing left scheduled in class meetings but each student-teacher’s brief presentation of an in-class public school observation. What would movement mean in this context? Even after our class conversation about the test, I’m not sure. I consider emailing Helen and rekindling the dialogue, but based on cues from her I believe that would be a choice meeting my needs, not hers; she has suggested that from her perspective resolution has already happened. The sense I have is that more pressing on my part would take something from Helen, not give her something. Also, this question of teacherly performances is one for all of us, one we have co-constituted in this classroom regardless of who raised the question initially. How can I respond, how might I give energy rather than take it, not only for Helen but for others? Will any movement in response be deferred only to my efforts in future classrooms?

One way I have strived in the past to help create dialogic spaces in which all student-teachers can reflect on and interrogate teacherly performances is through using performance-based activities in pedagogy courses. Yet in Helen’s class, the link between the dialogic and the performative may have been especially obscure because, in developing

classroom engagements, I made very few choices grounded explicitly in the body. One activity in the second week of class involved all of us moving our bodies systematically within the classroom space, directing ourselves toward a personal “goal” at one end of the room; the impetuses for our movements were narratives of educational advantages and disadvantages that we had authored earlier in that class meeting. Our subsequent conversation centered partly on our bodily (not merely our verbal) responses to the experience of generating movement in dialogue with narrative. The activity seemed well-received and I alluded to future work we would do, later in the semester, with performance, narrative and dialogue. But my preparation for this class never returned in a focused way to embodied activities. I did not bring in any material connected to performative pedagogy or to performance studies, and the body was rarely an explicit topic for us—until Helen, in our final class meeting on the scheduled “exam” day, insisting that she present her research last because she “has a surprise” for us, made the performing body our concluding topic for the course.

A wise friend and colleague in graduate school, during a conversation about the crushing burden of writing in our profession, once told me that papers are much, much easier to write if you set up the writing process so that you actually learn from the act of writing, rather than simply laying out a research paper in advance and then “writing up” your claims. I’ve tried for years to heed his advice, but this very essay is the one in which it has been most meaningful to me. My co-author and I had nearly completed this substantial revision of our paper on student-teacher metaphors about the teaching vocation when the final day of this course, and Helen’s presentation, arrived. I had already developed most of the autoethnographic narrative above, centered on her response to the second exam, and on her ensuing interrogation of my body and its effects in the classroom. We had chosen to conclude this section, and the paper as a whole, with a brief discussion of the following observation from Sabatini on such interrogations: “Naturally, to the degree that any instructor is the first speaker in a course, all subsequent utterance ‘refutes, affirms, supplements’ what has been stated by the course title, syllabus, and lectures. But there are many ways to access dialogization in a performance course through student responses” (200).

In these narratives students may be yoked yet again to our tales of the classroom as characters rather than narrators. Nevertheless, we offer them in the hope that the act of writing and the act of reading can teach us, and possibly others, about how and why we apprehend the act of teaching in

the ways that we do. We trust that efforts to engage in this vocational practice, by all teachers, are complex and multilayered, lending themselves to in-depth qualitative analysis and reflection. One confirming, and affirming, communicative moment that supports this notion is Helen's final presentation. After she had conducted a classroom observation of a Spanish language lesson in a multilingual third-grade class, Helen's assignment was to develop a presentation sharing with the rest of us how conflict affected learning in that environment. Helen requested the final presentation slot because she chose to engage us in a re-performance of the teacher's activity. This activity involved creating an "artificial conflict" for precious space at a "special" table among the third-graders, and Helen committed herself completely, as a presenter, to the situation as those young people might have experienced it. While the tone of research presentations typically involved semi-formal "stories" from the classroom, no presenter in seven previous semesters had developed a performative engagement, not even in those sections during which I foregrounded performance much more fully. Helen's presentation was essentially a brief performance ethnography, giving each of us in her audience the opportunity to explore in a rich, embodied manner the Spanish language lesson and its impact—the creation between performer and audience of a "third world" that is neither the world of the researched nor the world of the researcher (Denzin). Afterward, despite the fact that this was our final meeting together, that the weight of finals and their associated work were a part of life for all of us, despite Helen's performance taking several minutes longer than a typical presentation, we had a complex conversation about the performing body in the classroom for about another ten minutes before saying our goodbyes.

And so we end this paper hopeful that, despite the tangled paths we all follow through one another's narratives from the classroom, spaces exist—and are being created anew—to both imaginatively and literally inhabit the body of the teacher. These spaces are at once languaged and embodied, and metaphorical conceptions of teaching reflect this unity. One lesson we take from our exploration of Helen's and others' co-creation of these spaces is that the voice and the body interact in surprising and challenging ways when engaging the body of the teacher.

## **Appendix**

[This appendix includes our original review of Johnson's work on metaphor, language, force and embodied experience, for those who are

interested in the theory that grounds our identification of the four tropes we discuss in this essay.]

Lakoff and Johnson foreground metaphors as lynchpins of the conceptual systems that structure day to day thought, speech and action: “Our conceptual system [. . .] plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. [. . .] [O]ur conceptual system is largely metaphorical” (3). In making this case, the authors describe both explicitly articulated metaphors (e.g. “time is money” “bigger is better”) and implicit metaphors commonly utilized in reasoning (e.g. “argument is war,” “up is better,” “visual fields are containers”). They conclude that we make pervasive use of metaphors from one domain in which we have great experience (such as substances being inside or outside of containers) to make sense of or give distinctive weight to experiences in newer domains (such as “How did Jerry *get out of* washing the windows?”) (31). They highlight the importance of looking closely at communication in order to more fully account for the use of metaphoric analogies in structuring conception: “Since communication is based on the same conceptual system that we use in thinking and acting, language is an important source of evidence for what that system is like” (3).

Johnson extends this research by more closely considering the role of the human body and its movement through the world as an initial ground for metaphors. He develops a critique of various accounts of reasoning, arguing “propositional content is possible only by virtue of a complex web of nonpropositional schematic structures that emerge from our bodily experience” (5). In other words, for Johnson, when we make complex claims about the world we cannot merely rest these claims on a simpler set of principles or assumptions phrased in propositional form—e.g., one participant’s statement, “Teachers are very influential” (Malachi)—because even these simpler claims would beg the questions they answer. How do teachers influence others? What forms does this influence take? Does it always happen at a consistent rate? How influential is “very” influential?

Johnson suggests that we can get beneath the apparent bottomlessness of propositional claims if we acknowledge that we evaluate complex claims—at least in part—by metaphorically mapping those claims onto our embodied, day-to-day experiences in other contexts we already know. Moreover, he asserts that we begin to develop this mapping skill very early in life, because our bodies from the start are subject to a steady accumulation of remembered experiences that help to guide us (98).

How do such comparisons happen? Johnson holds that as our bodies develop a felt sense of the world over time, we begin to perceive our

relationship to the environment as integrated and predictable, rather than piecemeal and arbitrary—as “an organized, unified whole within our experience and understanding that manifests a repeatable pattern or structure” (44). In Johnson’s model, we are, from the start, looking for patterns in our embodied experience that make the world around us coherent. This coherence is mirrored in our cognitive expectations of the world, in the developing conceptions that enable us to predict what will happen when we are confronted with new challenges—felt or imagined.

As a part of this process, for Johnson metaphors themselves manifest an “internal structure that connects up aspects of our experience and leads to inferences in our conceptual system” (44). One thing, we come to expect, will be like another, at least until we are confronted with evidence to the contrary. We judge one thing to be like or unlike another by comparing the two things across an array of complex, holistic structural elements; this is why Johnson believes that propositional statements (which are based in simpler, narrower claims) don’t fully account for our reasoning. In the example above, “teachers are very influential” might be a coherent claim if our felt sense of influence—which is a complex conception likely involving years of having our bodies moved by forces around us, or using our bodies to move other things and people—is a good match for our experiences with teachers. A “felt sense of influence,” within this model, is a step beyond the traditional notion of a metaphor, in which one thing is propositionally linked with another (e.g., one participant’s remark that “being a teacher is being a guide”) (Elena). The notion “a felt sense of influence,” as a “metaphoric conception,” is a complex, holistic structure with an array of features. The complexity of metaphoric conceptions, their structured array of features grounded in many prior experiences, enables them to be effective analogues when we assess claims like, “teachers are very influential.”

In summary, Johnson develops two key ideas that fund the present study:

(1) We assess claims, at least in part, through comparing a new idea to a known idea in a multifaceted way, through a metaphoric mapping of a wide array of features across the two ideas.

(2) The complex metaphoric conceptions that form the basis for these comparisons are grounded in our felt experiences of the world, as our bodies confront and interact with the environment.

With respect to our use of embodied knowledge as a ground for metaphoric evaluations of experience, Johnson delineates six characteristics of our day-to-day experience of physical forces:

- (1) Forces are experienced through interaction
- (2) Forces move directionally as masses in a vector-like manner
- (3) Forces travel along a single path of motion
- (4) Forces travel from an original source toward a target
- (5) Forces include a degree of power or intensity
- (6) Forces act in a structured way, with a sequence of causality (43-44).

One participant's account of her own vocational path helps illustrate how these characteristics of force can shape—through metaphoric conceptions grounded in felt experience—talk about teaching:

I have never been taught how to teach [ . . . ] I was just put in the role and told, "You are going to be great at this." I had a mentor teacher whose position I was replacing, and she said to me, "How did you know how to do that, that is a really great idea, I've never thought of that," and I said, "I don't know, it just popped into my head." You know, 'cause no one has taught this so I wonder where it has come from.  
(Dee-Dee)

Dee-Dee's narrative presupposes that listeners understand how forces work on us. She communicates her own surprise, as well as the surprise of her mentor, by contrasting her experience of teaching with our expectations of forces: We expect them to have a causal sequence as well as a recognizable point of origin; if we are the target, the thing acted upon, we assume there must have been a single path of vector-like motion along which some mass traveled toward us. But Dee-Dee contends that her teaching knowledge (the "mass" in this metaphoric mapping) has no causal sequence advancing it ("How did you know how"); furthermore, this external mass lacks an identifiable point of origin from outside her ("it just popped into my head"). As a result of these confounded expectations, Dee-Dee insists that her listeners should now be thinking with her, sharing her conclusion that it is natural to expect knowledge to behave like other forces we know: "You know, 'cause no one has taught this so I wonder where it has come from." This final statement has the form of a simple propositional claim; Dee-Dee makes an observation about her own experience ("no one has taught this") and draws a conclusion directly afterward ("so I wonder where it has come from"). But she lends this simple proposition coherence by developing, in her preceding statements, an extended mapping of "knowing how to teach" onto the complex metaphoric conception we have formed of forces and their actions upon us.

Expectations and evaluations of a possible future in teaching are communicated, to oneself and others, through narrative. The contours of these narratives are shaped by metaphoric conceptions rooted in shared

bodily experiences: metaphoric conceptions that help lend coherence to the narratives. With Johnson's description of the human body's spatial and temporal orientations to goals and stimuli as our starting point, we used a recursive method of coding to analyze our focus group interview data. Accordingly, we initially selected from the transcripts moments in which participants' talk relied on explicit metaphors, or metaphoric analogies, of: movement by participants along a path toward a goal of their choosing; movement by participants along a path because they have been pulled by outside sources; movement and manipulation of objects by participants; vertical and horizontal reach or access; vertical and horizontal boundaries; participants recognizing or forming specific goals and moving toward them; and subjects responding to outside sources through sensory expression such as touch or gesture. Participants consistently returned to directional forces, physical capacities, and latent potentialities as they explained their perceptions. This strongly parallels Johnson's claim that basic embodied experiences shape our conceptualization of more abstract notions—such as teaching. This parallel guided our development of final categories of data analysis.

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