
Citation for the original published paper:

Body Matters: Innovative Epistemological Approaches to Scientific and Practical Knowledge in Pedagogy.

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

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http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:lnu:diva-68309
Body Matters – Innovative Epistemological Approaches to Scientific and Practical Knowledge in Pedagogy

Anja Kraus

Body Matters

Investigating educational realities by referring to descriptive concepts and definitions and doing work on the empiricism of their shaping-ups in educational realities seems to be the dominant mode of today’s educational investigations. Moreover, representing research results in quantities, metrics and numbers is often seen as the major advantage in scientific research, and as guaranteeing accountability and governance. However, there is no proof that such research serves the further development of reflexivity in the pedagogical fields (cp. Gruschka 2011). On the first glance this seems to be inconsistent, because at the same time there is scientific evidence about the success factors and the good prospects of the models proved by statistics.

This contribution departs from the hypothesis that this evidence is based on false presuppositions. This is to say, the performative accounts of education overshadow the fact that educational practices are ruled by the processing of knowledge, e.g. by materiality and contexts. That is to say, pedagogical concepts are not merely applied, but they are formed out, developed and challenged by practices under specific conditions and with pedagogical or non-pedagogical intentions. It is argued that one can grasp the epistemological dimensions of practices by referring to the concept of
the human body. This reference provides central process criteria of practices with educational and didactical intentions.

After neglecting the body in sociological and pedagogical research, the last decades constantly brought body matters back in (Kamper & Wulf 1982, Frank 1990 etc.). Since quite a long time in the Cultural as well as in the Social Sciences a turning to the topic of corporality is thus to be recognised and the paradigm shift also has an impact on the Educational Sciences. Not least it gained admission into diverse concepts of practical formation in school. These again have led to the realisation of projects like Moving School (in German: Bewegte Schule), Healthy School (in German: Gesunde Schule), Theatre is School (in German: Theater macht Schule), Creative School (In Swedish: Skapande skola). Insights in the learning impacts of corporeality also accompany the discussion concerning the great success of dancing projects in school like Rhythm Is It. Hereby, Physical Education, Aesthetic Formation, the aim to develop competencies, the didactical principles of active learning (Handlungsorientierung) and that of interdisciplinarity get essential impulses. In the end, the discourses about the human body lead to new priorities in terms of introducing body experience, wellness and the improvement of health (such as healthy breakfast or the ergonomics of sitting in school) to school. The compensation of deficits in the field of learning at school as well as the possibilities to improving bodily and motoric conditions of learning are thus discussed and further developed. The new concepts provide for new possibilities to improve attention efforts and social competencies (as e.g. the ability to communicate) and to decrease stress, aggression and violence.

However, it is often ignored that the paradigm shift that accompanies the rediscovery of corporality leads to a fundamental innovation also of the valid orders of thinking, respectively of the discourses in pedagogy like attention, movement, playing, improvisation etc. To each of the pedagogical terms a slightly different perspective on the corporality of pupils is created, opening the view on possibilities to take the specifics of learning processes at school into account. This is done by the reference to body concepts. In the last decennia, there has been a tenacious tradition of research
concerned with the role of the body in epistemic contexts; - to mention only five: From Polyani’s (1985) concerns about tacit dimensions of knowledge and Gibson’s (1979) ecological approach to the human mind Ryle (1969) completes the concept of knowledge by aspects of knowing how. The concept of the flesh by the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1968) conceptualizes the body that matters as not only embedded into structures and ruled by power, but also as causing structures and power. Neo-phenomenological concepts refer to such ideas (Crossley 2001, Schmitz 2003 etc.), as well as it has been added to sociological and feminist accounts of bodies and materiality.

From this perspective, it comes into sight that body knowledge comprises a whole range of inexplicit dimensions that are crucial in shaping pedagogic processes and practices. These dimensions have not been investigated systematically in a manual on tacit dimensions of pedagogy. The task of the papers in this symposium is to map out some approaches to scientific knowledge referring to concepts on the body, and to consider what this focus on the body offers in terms of its epistemological potential for a research on educational realities. We aim at bringing together methodological and empirical examples of state of the art research from general didactics, sport and body pedagogy, and arts education to explore what a focus on body matters can do to cast new light on educational realities and take forward educational research in new avenues.

In this paper, the epistemology of displacement is ciphered out as a central process criterion of practices with educational and didactical intentions.

**Displacement as a Didactical Strategy - How to Use Contemporary Art Methods in School Education**

**Didactics and the Epistemology of Displacement**

The Didactics tradition is locally bound to the European continent, and it is usually seen as the equivalent to the Anglophone curriculum tradition. While the latter focuses
on the question when to learn what, Didactics is driven by the question how to create knowledge in a teacher-student-thing-relationship. The reference to contemporary art methods as learning settings is about to serve both, the organisation of learning in time and space, as well as the relational aspects of learning. Martin Heidegger writes in *Was ist Denken?* (1954, 1, transl. by AK): “What is learning? A human learns as far as s/he brings his/her acting and his/her letting be in line with the essentials that are assigned to him/her. We learn to think by noting what is to be considered.”

Assignment in German is distribution as well as approval and encouragement. In school it is most of the times the teacher who assigns a task to the pupil and approving and encouraging her/him. In the context of art the stimulation comes from the artwork.

Referring to the artist Robert Smithson (see Holt 1979) and Michel Foucault’s interpretation of space and sites as nodal points of disparate discourses, Christiane Brohl unfolds displacement as an (art-) didactic strategy and form of learning, and as a method of art-based research as well.

Brohl (2008, 35, transl. by AK) writes, “[…] displacement at first describes a spatial relocation of art situated in the institution of the museum and then moved to public spaces. Displacement signifies a change in the understanding of art: The production of art works is replaced by the discursive practices of doing art based on a special location. Moreover, displacement is the special artistic reading of a location by another location, the intuitive relating of materials, information and associations.”

Displacement is a change of location, which is re-enacted by perception: E.g. entering a space where an artwork is located is nearly always connected to certain expectations. This artwork may be the ready-made of Marcel Duchamp’s “Fountain” (1917), the replique of it is situated at the Tate Modern in London. Thus, entering the white cube, one sees a pissoir. This certainly not resembles the expectations in a museum. Did one enter a toilet instead? Is the museum under construction? Anyway, for a moment the museum loses its usual eminence. The artwork makes us perceive the location in terms of meaning-making. This effect is based on the reciprocal interpretation of the object, here the artwork, and its context as displacement. Not so much the *truth of the things*

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1. ‘Was ist lernen? Der Mensch lernt, insofern er sein Tun und Lassen zu dem in die Entsprechung bringt, was ihm jeweils an Wesenhaftem zugesprochen wird. Das Denken lernen wir, indem wir auf dasachten, was es zu bedenken gibt.”
is the matter here. The meaning of the artwork moreover *invades* and even *intervenes* in a common discourse and semantic field that is connected to a specific site. Usually something *counts as* truth, like a building that counts as a museum. However, the ready-made of Marcel Duchamp “Fountain” resignifies the space and thus puts it at stake: What is a museum? Is it a hardware store, a construction site, a…? The new issue merges into the familiarities (cp. Waldenfels 1999, 167).

Robert Smithson, a Land artist, established the principle of displacement as overall ruling his art approach. He calls it Site and Non-Site: Site is a certain place. One can visit an artwork as a Site. A Non-Site, like a book, a photograph, a thought, indicates a Site. The Non-Site is the interpretation of a Site. It is the result of displacement, a removal of something to another location that implies the conservation of the meaning of the original Site. There is a dialectic tension between a Site and a Non-Site. This tension is conducted by passage between a Site and a Non-Site, by practices based on time, duration and physical participation. Such displacement cannot be made visible. However, in this displacement, connections between facts are built that have not been conceivable, or even did not exist before. New forms of the use of things can be provided, as well as the change of their reasonable foundations. Thus, discourses, and by these, institutional linkages, historical bonding, the interpretation of a space etc. (Foucault 1975), are clarified, reflected and can even be changed.

By the notion “resignifying something” one can describe all learning. This fact can be used for a didactics that uses contemporary art concepts and methods not as a topic of itself but as a method for all school subjects. In the following, an example will be given for the significance of this method for learning that is part of the didactics of
English as a foreign language: The so called Art Walk within the English Language Lab (ELL). The model has been developed at Ringsbergskolan/Sweden in order to develop familiarity with English as a foreign language.

**Making Oneself Familiar with the English Language: Art Walk**

The didactical approach starts from the insight that familiarity (förtrogenhet) – here with a foreign language – mostly develops as a hidden curriculum (Carlgren 2011). Hidden curriculum (Dreeben 1968, Jackson 1968, Elias 1994, Foucault 1975, Bourdieu 1986) means that all didactics is accompanied by unintended transmissions of norms, values, and beliefs conveyed in the classroom as well as in a social environment. Thus, in order to create familiarity and to foster learning, such norms, values, and beliefs are to be evoked and put up for change by methodical settings, as well as by classroom interaction. ELL applies two didactical approaches, the exploration how different texts interact with each other in a horizontal mediation (1), and the idea that something gets meaning by the form of its representation as Site and Non-Site (2).

(1) The horizontal mediation (Örtegren & Marner 2003) concerns the exploration how different meanings interact with each other.

(2) A Site, to repeat it, is scattered information, a place you can visit, experience, travel-to; a Non-Site is an abstract work about contained information.

I will focus on the didactical use of the Site and Non-Site concept in an Art Walk:

In an Art Walk the pupils transfer themselves from the traditional classroom into the public city landscape - shortly speaking, they go for a walk. During the Art Walk, they experience the city environment together and simultaneously they explore their former experience and knowledge of it. They get encouraged to use different, that is to say physical, bodily, mental and perceptual ways of acquiring knowledge in the confrontation and interaction with the public space. Before they go for a walk, the course starts by the revelation of what is called the question, followed by a common polyphonic discussion (the pupils’ ideas, experience and thoughts are supposed to be
shared in an accessible way for everyone). Its results are gathered in a mind map. A question follows the attainment targets for the curriculum of the English subject. In order to stimulate the discussion, mostly broad and open, philosophical questions are asked, e.g. How do people communicate without words and why? What is a language? As an example, in the course *What’s a spoken language?* an attainment target is phonetics. Therefore, firstly, a short course about phonetics is conducted. The aim is to get the students to understand that the phonetic symbols represent sounds and not letters; in a wider sense, they learn that there are different symbol systems of written language. In the next class, the pupils receive a map with a given route and certain stops where deeper investigations on written language are supposed to take place. Papers, pencils, mobiles, cameras and recording devices are the material for documentation provided to them. The pupils then record sounds and write them down in phonetic symbols, as well as they gather written language (labels, tattoos, traffic signs etc.). These words they translate into English and they find images and, thus, a new context for the words. This context they express in a piece of music or a storyboard, digital story, a picture, a text, a clothing, etc., whatever they like. The work is to be enclosed with questions as: What is to be seen? What is to be heard? What emotions are expressed? The purpose is to involve intellectual as well as emotional skills into reflexivity acts.

From the pedagogical and didactic point of view, the society outside the classroom is regarded as a vivant and instructive resource for education, or as a library home (cp. Benjamin 1968). The pupils become aware that they can use their non-school knowledge within the school context. The classroom is seen as laboratory where the dialogue between the physical sites that the pupils explore outside school and the findings at school takes place. Sites and Non-Sites get into a dynamic dialogue. In such synthesis, a sort of estrangement is created which would not occur without the educational context. Therefore, these two parts, the school and the public environment have equal educational values. They both have the same necessarily value in terms of the didactic perspective. The work with images is seen as a way to problematize and analyze their life-world. In the process of transformation from one form of expression
to another the pupil is forced to distance him-/herself from one expression, read it with new eyes.