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## Movement and the body in teaching: challenging the commonsense dualism

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Much has been written on schools as sites for controlling young people and reproducing particular citizens. As part of these conversations there seems to be a ‘commonsense’ view that schooling is about educating the mind while at the same time taming the body. This is reflected in the promotion of academic subjects (e.g. senior maths) over practical subjects (e.g. senior drama), in superiority of cognitive word-based communication (e.g. reading and writing) over other forms of communication (e.g. visual, movement), and in the coupling of serious learning with stationary individual deskwork in classroom settings rather than physically active work incorporating movement and the body. The underlying assumption that is being played out in such learning environments reflects that of Cartesian dualism, also referred to as a mind/body dualism and credited to the seventeenth century philosopher, Descartes. I would argue that this dualism is partly responsible for student disengagement with schooling and related to other issues including bullying and disconnection with healthy lifestyles. Consequently, I am advocating for teachers and schools to interrupt mind/body hierarchies by attending to the *embodied* learner, a concept that will be unpacked below before suggesting measures to help start this process.

By understanding a learner to have *embodied subjectivities* we can then talk about learning as something one does through the body, as a body, for the body, about the body and to the body yet going beyond the body as an object or thing. As well it allows us to think of learning to be non-linear, contextually based, constructed by the learner and her/his positioning within social spaces, and therefore requiring different things from schooling experiences. The concept of embodied subjectivity/ies acts as one way of understanding a person, such as a teacher or student, but as holistically rather than separate parts. By *embodied* I mean that it is associated with the body both in how one’s dispositions are played out through the body (e.g. how one demonstrates being ‘girl’ through how one walks, talks, dresses, etc) and how one’s body is constituted or understood by others (ie how one is read through lenses of gender, race, class, shape, etc). *Subjectivities* implies multiple and fluid selves, a different conceptualisation to the traditional stable and unitary self with a fixed *identity*, a term more commonly found in education psychology. In effect, embodied subjectivities challenges the dominant way of knowing and therefore the knowledge that is prioritised, reproduced and reified within schooling. This dominant way of knowing that is rational, language-based, conceptual and disembodied denies many young people the opportunity to learn in

other ways leaving them disenchanted or disengaged (Hunter, 2002) and sometimes physical in their protest.

Learning that engages the body or explicitly focuses upon the body is not a new concept by any means. Physical education, dance and drama remain in many curricula and some teachers use movement to work through concepts associated with number, language and literacy. However, as students progress through their years of schooling the mind/body dualism becomes enacted more strongly and ways of knowing become compartmentalised as important 'conceptual' subjects (e.g. maths) and less important subjects using the body (e.g. physical education). Arguably this is reflected in things such as curriculum time given to subjects, roles given to teachers in particular subject areas (English and maths for curriculum development, drama for concerts) and what gets assessed (content and conceptual knowledge) and how (pen and paper tests). At the same time within the subjects that attend to movement and the body often only limited and sometimes oppressive learning can take place. As an example, physical education is charged with getting the students physically active and many debates arise over the allocation of time to 'theory' and 'prac' as two separate activities. Much of the practices within PE support the mind/body separation and act to set the body up as an object, a machine that can be measured and trained, again distanced from a concept such as embodied subjectivity. So how might schooling respond?

Some practical measures or steps to start discussions and actions to address learning as embodied might include the following:

- encourage activity-based learning in the more conventional classrooms where students are bounded by desks, their bodies controlled so that their minds can work;
- talk about and work with the student as a person, rather than their body as a thing. Translate that understanding into how you talk about people as an educator and/or physical educator (your language). Translate that understanding into your action in how you treat yourself, your students and your colleagues (your action);
- rather than talking about a person as two or more parts, a mind and a body, the first independent and superior to the second, treat the person as a whole, someone who thinks, moves, feels, etc using all of their selves;
- notice how you talk about skill. Rather than breaking skill down into thought preceding action recognise that thinking may be included in performance but during action and at an unconscious level;
- recognise and talk about great performance as one type of brilliance or intelligence not traceable to a single sort of thinking;
- encourage non-verbal forms of expression as an equally valid form as verbalisation, movement as equally valid to words;
- use students' experiences and understandings of their own body and movement, through the language of embodied selves, as the focus for learning, have them explore how they are who they are as expressed through their embodied subjectivities;
- listen to student descriptions of movement, physicality, images of themselves and others and use this as a basis on which to build their understanding of themselves in relation to stereotypes based on the 'average' or the 'normal'. Use their understandings to tease out what a *healthy and physically active young person* or *socially just citizen* might 'be' in action and ask them to demonstrate or perform this rather than asking what they might 'look' or 'sound like'; and
- interact with students as people who are exploring movement and the capabilities of themselves, as decision-makers, as people with lives and emotions, not just bodies that are to be exercised in a physical education class for motor learning or physiological change.

In conclusion, I suggest that by bringing to the fore the embodied selves of young people in the curriculum, regarding the body and movement to be a site for, and of, learning, that other issues such as body image, social relationships, relevant curriculum, democratic classrooms, student

participation, curriculum engagement, bullying, depression, life-long health and physical activity, images of young people, and community building can follow. For this to happen educators, and those adults who have a role in the lives of young people, require a shift in philosophy away from educating the mind not the body; from a mind/body dualism to embodied subjectivities; from a stable, single, fixed identity to multiple and shifting subjectivities; from student-as-decided-upon-and-for-by adults to students-as-knowledge constructors; and from student as deficient adolescent to student as a capable person. Therein lies the challenge.

#### References

Hunter, L. (2002). Young people, physical education, and transition: understanding practices in the middle years of schooling. Doctoral thesis, School of Human Movement Studies. Brisbane, The University of Queensland: 374.

About the author: Dr Lisa Hunter is currently working in Middle Years Teacher Education program at The University of Queensland to encourage teachers to use movement and engage with learning-as-embodied across the curriculum. Her background is in primary and secondary teaching through health and physical education, and secondary teaching through geography and music. Lisa's recent doctoral work was about young people's experiences in their middle years of schooling focussing on the transfer from primary to secondary school.