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Fostering inclusion in school through creative and body-based learning

Abstract

In neoliberal times, accountability measures and high-stakes testing further contribute to differentiated outcomes for young people. The way that knowledge is conceptualised in tests regularly fails to recognise the embodied knowledge and abilities of many young people and instead students are positioned as passive receivers of knowledge. Students who are located in structural disadvantage continue to be least successful. This paper offers a critical counter-narrative to the didactic habit inherent in education through the mobilisation of creative and embodied practices as a transformational pedagogical approach. These pedagogies signal an epistemological and pedagogical shift toward mobilising bodies as agents of knowledge production and creativity as cultural capital. This paper reports on research that investigates primary school teachers and teaching artists using creative and body-based pedagogies, with a focus on enhancing student engagement in mathematics through strategies of ‘encounter’ (Massumi, 1996). Findings highlight the cumulative affective responses and shifts in subjectivity for both students and teachers when working with the body’s ability to move, feel, respond and imagine. In conclusion we argue for the potential of creative and body-based learning to build classroom communities and practices of inclusion.

Keywords: embodiment, affect, arts pedagogy, critical pedagogy, creative body-based learning

Introduction

International literature has long searched for ways to address social justice in education leading to numerous interpretations and versions of critical pedagogy. Underpinning these theories are various positions that focus on systems or governmentality, the teacher who operates within a neoliberal system and the student who is located by the ‘dispositive’ (Foucault, 1977 cited in Gordon, 1980; Springer, 2012). In focusing on teachers, we recognise their pedagogical practices as fundamental to students’ success (Lingard, 2007; Lingard and Mills, 2007), especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Teacher accountability and high-stakes testing have become commonplace in contemporary schooling and impact on pedagogic possibilities. Overwhelmed with daily challenges, teachers often revert to explicit or default pedagogies (Johnston and Hayes, 2007) that are tightly controlled and teacher-directed (Comber and Nixon, 2009; Comber, 2014). Invariably, these approaches have little value in supporting deep understandings or critical thinking and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds continue to be among those who are least successful (Comber and Kamler, 2004; Yates, 2013; Wilkins, 2012).

Critical pedagogy is a philosophy of praxis concerned with emancipation and committed to a process of transformation (Giroux, 2017; Smith, Edwards-Groves and Brennan Kemmis, 2010). It is a process by which critical theory is enacted within the context of schooling to disrupt the dominant narratives that marginalise particular groups and impact on their freedom to be ‘included’ in schooling (McInerney, Smyth and Down 2011; Smyth and Hattam 2001). However, putting critical pedagogy into practice in the context of schools that increasingly align with neoliberal principals is both complex and challenging. When educational policy is redefined to serve economic interests, teachers are constituted as responsible but at the same time paralysed in opportunity to explore alternate pedagogical options (Wrigley, Lingard and Thomson 2012).

Guided by the principle of praxis (Smith, Edwards-Groves and Brennan Kemmis 2010), our commitment to social justice is drawn from work that explicitly advocates the use of the body, affect, and creative processes as contributing factors in transforming pedagogy for those working with disadvantaged populations. In contributing to the intersections between theory and practice this paper reports on a *Creative and Body-based Learning* (CBL) initiative intended as a provocation for teachers to mobilise the metaphors inherent within critical pedagogy.

In this paper, we discuss conceptual resources that address inclusive education including theories of affect, aesthetics and embodied pedagogies as a theoretical base for transformative action. Proceeding from this work we describe a CBL curriculum approach as our point of departure and version of critical pedagogy. Next, we describe the enactment of a CBL professional learning project as well as findings from our study that drew on teacher standpoints and reflections to highlight shifts in subjectivity for both teachers and students. In conclusion, we argue for a pedagogy of inclusion that engages with the body and creativity as vehicles for learning and a means for success.

Theories of affect, aesthetics and embodied pedagogy

In developing a theoretical base for this work we are drawn to theories of affect, aesthetics and embodiment. Western educational practices have traditionally valued the mind over the body with a Cartesian division that privileges a rational view of knowledge untainted by the body, its feelings, or emotions (Turner, 1996). Postmodern and feminist scholarship has certainly challenged this thinking and drawn attention to the absence of the body in pedagogy (Corrigan 1988; Giroux 1985; McLaren 1988; Price and Shildrick 2017). While feminist theories have asserted notions of ‘embodied knowing’ and highlight how culture inscribes the body (Fine 2007; hooks 2000), post structural analyses draw attention to the social construction of bodies as well as the various ways the body is transcribed by culture, mediates

power and expresses resistance (Shapiro 2005; Turner 1996). However, seldom seen in this work is thinking about pedagogy where the body/subject as a lived medium becomes part of the curriculum, or what this might mean for a pedagogy concerned with social justice. In this research we are interested in the capacity of the body to effect change, remap affective routes and allow access to knowledge and learning (Shapiro 2005).

The concept of physicality is central to an embodied notion of pedagogy. Far from being an obstacle to learning, the body can be seen as a vehicle for human understanding (Bordo 1993) with sensory abilities that provide a rich source for understanding (Bresler 2004; Cravey and Petit 2012; Ivinson 2012; Nguyen and Larson 2015). As the body moves and experiences, it interprets these experiences physically, emotionally and cognitively such that bodily memories continue to exist within the body and sense of self (MacKenzie 2013). Importantly, bodily activity is intimately connected with both affect and intellect where learning evolves from the body's power to feel, sense, respond and imagine (Hickey-Moody 2009). We do not *have* a body we *are* a body. We depend on our body to feel, to understand, to make meaning, and to learn. Affect as a vital force or capacity calls us to think about the role of senses and feelings that drive thought, understanding and ultimately learning (Spinoza 1994). In resonating with pedagogical ideas around feeling capable (Massumi 2002) mobilising and sustaining powerful feelings or 'intensities' can free students to constitute themselves differently in the 'art of 'becoming' (Zembylas 2007, 148).

In challenging the privileging of cognitive aspects of learning, Dewey long since drew attention to the connection between affect and cognition (Dewey 1938). However, despite a continuing rhetoric of education for the 'whole child', ideas about how this might actually be put into practice have been less forthcoming (Probyn 2004). As Wilcox (2009, 107) suggests:

We let children sit in classrooms hoping the state of their bodies does not reflect the state of their minds...it is the thoughts that count; the bodies that think and utter these thoughts are irrelevant.

In this work we were interested to know what happens when teachers are introduced to pedagogies that explicitly promote physicality, aesthetics and expression of the body, pedagogies that disrupt the conventional spatial relational discipline systems of classrooms? How do teachers 'feel' about these pedagogies? How might they see themselves (or their students) differently?

Arts practice and pedagogy is inherently embodied and relies on imagination and aesthetic experience (Franks, Thomson, Hall and Jones, 2014; Greene, 1995). It is developed through the disciplines and principles of drama, dance, music and visual art where learning is rooted in creative thinking and aesthetics (Sefton-Green, Thomson, Jones and Bresler, 2011). In drawing meaningful insights through artistic production, arts practices provide students with authentic aesthetic experiences (Dewey 1934; Kraehe and Brown 2011). This is a complete embodied, cognitive, affective and social experience of an artistic work. It is more than a set of principles underlying a work or appreciation of beauty, it is the whole embodied, sensual experience that we are changed by (Efland 2007; Wang 2001).

Arts pedagogies essentially allow students to use their imagination, have original ideas and generate multiple solutions (Miksza 2013; Thomson and Sefton-Green 2011). The value of these approaches is in their power to mobilise affect, utilise multiple intelligences and offer various modes of representation and expression thus allowing students (and teachers) to explore and communicate in ways that might not otherwise be possible (Katz 2015; Osei-Kofi 2013). Arts experiences also require students to take risks and think laterally as part of the creative process (Simons and Bateman 2000; Ewing 2010). As such, they create affective states that powerfully shape subjectivities and sense of self.

Arts practices also rely on collaboration where students work with and around others to create artistic works. This aligns with Biesta's (1994) notions of learning as 'a co-constructive process' (311-312) that is also achieved through dialogic processes that are made explicit when examining or deconstructing the artwork, play or performance. Higher-order thinking and processes of metacognition can be attained through critical reflection where students are encouraged to closely observe, analyse and reflect (Chappell and Chappell 2016; Cunnington, Kantrowitz, Harnett and Hills-Ries 2014). In the collaborative sharing of these reflections, the arts not only develop imagination they cultivate new ways of seeing the world (Greene 1995) and a critical consciousness that makes change possible (Freire 1996).

Significantly, Greene's critical legacy on aesthetic education informs the theoretical and practical work of arts education where arts-based activities create something that 'forces us to think'. This something is not an object of recognition but of a fundamental *encounter* (Deleuze 2004, 176). Significantly, an *encounter* demands listening with bodies, feeling with emotions and engaging with critical and creative selves. It is created through the aesthetic and affective moments where participants 'lean in' and work towards a collective assembled knowledge informed by students' own funds of knowledge. *Encounters* allow collective ideas to emerge rather than a re-cognition of individual worldviews and take students and teachers to new places of understanding.

Arts pedagogies also centralise principles of social justice and democracy (Biesta 2010). In considering the relationship between education and democracy, Rancière (2004) talks of the arts as a kind of 'disruptive pedagogy' that encourages alternative forms of knowledge production and communication. They disrupt what counts as knowledge and who is valued as a knowledge producer (Lambert 2012). His work resonates with the philosophies of Dewey (1938), Freire (1996), Giroux (1985) and Biesta (2014) who all share faith in a pre-emptive view of equality. From a student perspective, equality is arguably perceived as

having equal value, agency and rights to produce knowledge that contributes to change. In accordance with these generative aims, the Arts produce ‘aesthetic moments’ that contribute to new ways of thinking, being and doing (Biesta 2014; McDonnell 2017) where the inaudible becomes audible (Deleuze and Guattari 2003).

The resources and conceptual ideas identified above mark the powerful intensities and unique pedagogic potential of embodied and arts pedagogies to encourage critical awareness and self-transformation. By reinserting the body and creative learning into pedagogical discourse we call for a version of critical pedagogy that takes the body, affect and aesthetics as genuine vehicles for access and engagement with learning. We are interested in critical, inclusive practices that involve feeling and senses; and how physicality, thinking, feeling and imagining all contribute to shifting subjectivities. In this way a creative and embodied pedagogy has potential to challenge social inequalities, to go beyond the potential static nature of speech and language and construct young people as active makers of meaning who combine multi-modal resources to create forms of signification (Ivinson 2012, 503).

Creative body-based learning

In drawing on the ideas above, the purpose of this work was to exemplify a critical pedagogy that includes the body and creativity as tools for knowledge creation and understanding. In pursuing these aims we developed a curriculum initiative entitled: *Creative and Body-based Learning* (CBL) that combined narrative, artistic and embodied endeavours to access and understand curriculum material.

The pedagogical approach draws on strategies within Drama-Based Pedagogy (DBP) and includes activating dialogue activities that are used to encourage sharing, understanding and co-creation of ideas. Game like strategies are used to rehearse curriculum material, develop fluency and recall. Image work is utilised to create material or corporeal representations of curriculum concepts and role play strategies are used to develop problem

solving scenarios and connect real world situations to learning (Dawson and Lee 2018). In the context of this work, these strategies were shared and intended to act as provocations for teachers to reimagine pedagogical practices that allow access to curriculum material for students traditionally disengaged with schooling.

During the strategies, student embodied feelings and perspectives are actively sought through a describe-analyse-relate (DAR), reflection process. Here, students engage in a ritualised cycle of reflection and connection to life-worlds. In asking generative questions that draw on the learners' sensorial experience, the teacher builds knowledge and supports collective meaning making. Initial emphasis is on drawing out affective and embodied states from learners by asking: What did you do? How did you feel? How were you successful? Generally, this is followed by questions that ask students to interpret their experiences in relation to curriculum goals (What does this mean? What did we learn?) and then relate this learning to broader contexts (Where else would this be useful?). These interactive exchanges are intended to include all students as well as encourage deep listening and the building of collective understandings.

Research methodology

A case study of CBL professional learning that focused on the teaching of mathematics and associated teacher action research was employed to investigate the processes of change for teachers as they utilised CBL approaches with their students. The focus for this paper was on mapping the detectable shifts in teachers' thinking, feeling and action when they worked with CBL. Accordingly, the research question driving the work asked how teacher subjectivity and pedagogy were affected when teachers engaged with artists in creative and body-based pedagogy. We were interested in the shifts in teacher and student subjectivity as well as what happened for learners when transferring CBL from workshops to the classroom.

Specifically, the study sought to investigate the enactment of CBL strategies for teachers at eight schools in the Northern and Southern suburbs of Adelaide, South Australia, areas of high and persistent disadvantage. The teachers and schools were contacted through two educational directors who saw potential in the CBL professional development for teachers and schools in their partnership. In what follows we draw on data collected in transcripts of interviews conducted with teacher participants. We analysed these descriptive findings in terms of theoretical resources around embodiment, arts and aesthetics as well as the practical possibilities of a critical, inclusive pedagogy.

The project began with a two-day professional development workshop where a range of CBL strategies were shared. Teachers from each school then collaborated with local artists to redesign pedagogical practice in mathematics for their students. The teachers and artists planned together then delivered their co-designed lessons. Lessons drew on CBL strategies shared in the workshops as well as the artists' personal repertoires in dance, drama and or visual arts. Participating teachers also came together for monthly workshops across the course of the year where further examples of creative and embodied practice were shared.

In the context of mathematics learning, strategies that 'activate dialogue' were used to encourage mathematical vocabulary as well as connect new mathematics learning to prior understandings. 'Games' were utilised to rehearse understandings as well as fluency and recall. 'Image work' was used to create material representations of math concepts, such as angles, and 'role play' was utilised to engage students in problem solving and connect learning to real world situations. In order to capture the lived experiences, perspectives and subject positions taken by teachers, semi structured interviews as extended conversations were conducted a number of times across the year. Our focus was on teacher subjectivity, how they made sense of working with CBL, how they thought about themselves as teachers as

well as how they thought about and talked about their students. We now present these findings according to thematic analysis of shifts and changes for teachers and students.

Findings

Shifts and challenge

Teachers talked about CBL representing a shift toward considering how bodies and creative activity might be more involved in learning. It asked them to do different things in the classroom where moving bodies sometimes challenged their notion of classroom control. As below, a number of teachers in the project talked about being pushed personally as well as pedagogically.

I think it pushes us out of our comfort zone as well, to try different techniques that I wouldn't have even necessarily thought of ... and being silly.... 'I'm allowed to be an idiot now'. (CD2)

The idea of being pushed out of comfort zones was both liberating and haunting as it moves away from default technicist practices toward aesthetic moments that offer new ways of being and doing teaching (Biesta, 2014). Teacher beliefs shifted throughout the year as strategies were shared, discussed, experimented with and modified to meet the needs of sites and students. In many ways, teachers were improvising *with* rather than replicating strategies where teachers, operating as critical pedagogues, were very much sensitive to the characteristics and conditions of (their) particular situations (Garfield, 2007). Teachers in the project generally indicated that their classrooms were 'noisier' but there was also a sense of 'rightness' about these changes. In the quote that follows evidence of a shift in pedagogical practice had implications for spaces needed.

I don't, I couldn't go back to being a chalk and talk because I know how disengaged the kids get. We're actually looking at rearranging the physical classroom now for more flexible learning. (MD1)

Marked in their dialogue was a sense of hopefulness and excitement in the potential of CBL as a teaching strategy that could be mobilised across multiple learning areas. Both students and teachers became engaged in how they might change their classroom space to enable further use of CBL strategies. Invariably teachers talked about their success as teachers in terms of changes that were happening procedurally, cognitively or affectively for their students. They talked about CBL not necessarily being an 'extra' set of expectations but something that made them more aware of how they were 'doing' teaching, as well as what was happening for student bodies in their classrooms. In this way experiences in CBL provided an *encounter* that forced teachers to think and view teaching in new and different ways (Deleuze 2004; Greene 1994).

Student and teacher standpoints

Student response to working with creative and body-based strategies was initially varied. Teachers talked of students not being quite comfortable with their bodies or being touched by others. Additionally, during reflections the teachers commented that initially 'the same students who always have their hand up' were again the main contributors to group discussions. However, there seemed to be something persuasive about using bodies and imagination that hooked students in and evoked curiosity such that teachers were encouraged to persevere. In what follows there is evidence of the neoliberal student and a teacher who tried to gain trust with learning that was more open-ended and therefore dangerous.

They have this engrained innate belief they have to have the right answer, so I'm using a different approach with them: 'just rough it ... afterwards we can talk about it and reflect on it and refine' ... So, getting the kids to trust that process and

get the concept of ‘there is no failure’... for me that’s so much more exciting.

(OS2)

Significant here is the move to unsafe spaces regarding the binaries of right and wrong toward the liberation of exploration and possible failure. From her point of view ‘roughing it’ and ‘trusting that process’ indicates a valuing of open-endedness as a pedagogical outcome that clearly challenges commonplace procedures and needing to have the ‘right answer’.

Certainly, teachers in this project were well aware of the contradictory neoliberal pressures placed upon them, as well as the ways that their ‘default’ pedagogies emerged in times of stress and were not necessarily the way they liked to teach nor why they were attracted to teaching in the first place (Thomson 2002). As indicated below, witnessing changes and connections made by students evoked a sense of satisfaction not previously possible in the pressured environment of the neoliberal crush camp.

You get very technocratic because time is of the essence... And the curriculum’s so huge now and you have to document everything ... just letting go of that ridiculous need to control everything and trust the learning ... you’re going to see and hear, the language, the knowledge and ... the connections that they make; that can’t be something they copy off the board ... it’s just, yeah...good. (OS2)

In ‘letting go’ of prior approaches these comments give indication of how CBL can operate as Rancière’s ‘disruptive pedagogy’ unsettling notions of what counts as knowledge as well as who might be a knowledge producer (cited in Lambert 2011).

A way in to learning

Teachers were mindful of the resistance that some students held toward mathematics. One teacher’s reflections of her students’ dispositions began with: ‘Sometimes they build brick walls to learning’. She continued,

they're so intimidated by maths ... this head set of 'I can't do it, Mum can't do it, my whole family's dumb blah, blah, blah', there's your brick wall.... What about pulling down this wall and just let it filter in ...with your body. (OS1)

Notions of filtering here align with embodied ideas of learning that 'settles' in students' bodies and allows access to curriculum knowledge (Franks et al. 2014). From her point of view, the use of bodies provided, for some, a way in to learning and an opportunity to think about themselves differently. This was echoed from a number of teachers in the group. In moving away from deficit notions of students, teachers noticed that by engaging in visual, physical and verbal modes of sharing learning, some of their most reluctant math students began to engage and take up different subject positions in relation to mathematics. In what follows, it became apparent that CBL provided safe and inclusive environments that encouraged all students to think of themselves as learners.

...it does engage everyone, it gets everyone involved, there's like no worry about taking a risk because you move from one place to another, ... using your body, it does actually give everyone the opportunity to learn. (JH2)

Here the teacher identifies aspects of CBL that were key to inclusion for her students including understandings of teaching and learning that engage with the whole feeling, thinking, embodied child.

Adding something to the classroom

Teachers spoke about CBL 'adding something' to their classrooms and their pedagogy that engaged students on multiple levels and made them 'happier'. Even in interview transcripts, the teachers' enthusiasm at seeing reluctant students engaged was deep and palpable. It was 'felt' by the teachers and confirmed for them a sense of purpose and enjoyment in their work.

...so the role playing, the drama, the music, the arts ...its... like adding colour into something, it's just amazing how much more engaged it makes the students.

(OS3)

Teachers spoke about the affective changes they saw in students. 'Smiling', 'laughing' 'having fun' were common comments used about students when working with CBL and mathematics. However, students were also spoken about in terms of significant learning and 'light bulb' moments. As one teacher suggested: 'it's not just play, there is much deeper stuff going on' (MD1), indicative of a shifting belief in the educative value of working with and through the body.

Smiling. Like laughing, smiling, happy. Their faces look happy. They get excited, you know, when we say we're going to do something. (LO2)

What emerges from the data is a sense that CBL creates and is nurtured by a series of affective 'intensities' that were different (and more engaging) than the rational control of knowledge that often typifies default mathematics pedagogy (Leander and Bolt 2012).

It was clear from the interviews that teachers generally saw their students as capable however; the shift with CBL was described in terms of student capabilities becoming 'more evident' to them as teachers. Teachers talked of witnessing 'light-bulb' moments and students were more generally spoken about in terms of what they 'could do' and what they 'did know'. In taking up the challenge of activating multiple intelligences (Gardner 1995), CBL could be seen here as offering new possibilities to demonstrate, show and experience learning thus opening opportunities for inclusion. Some teachers saw more persistence and risk taking in students. This was generally thought to be due to a different and more supportive learning environment where learning was generally collective and failure not demonized (Katz 2015). However, as indicated below, there was also something powerful about the use of the body that seemed to reach out to students, reduce their anxiety and encourage perseverance.

And they're more resilient in persisting with a task that was one of the things I noticed. Before, some kids would just stand back, whereas now you can, because they're relaxed, ... they're more likely to keep going when they're challenged ... and not as afraid to get an answer wrong. (CD2)

A number of teachers were surprised at the knowledge students held when given opportunities to demonstrate learning in ways that extended beyond text. In the example below, one teacher talks of her own response to her student's achievement.

And someone will come out with the most obscure thing that just rocks my world, like a kid who just sat there and ...(said) 'Oh well, in history the other day we talked about primary and secondary sources of information. That's like when we have primary and secondary data when we did that and I can make a connection across'. And I've just gone 'oh wow!... they are so clever'. (OS2)

In statements like this, words sometimes fail to capture the intensities felt. They also align with Rancière's presumption of equality where CBL is offering alternative ways to exhibit student abilities, which in turn allows them to verify that they are both intelligent and independent (Biesta 2010). In fostering inclusion, CBL works here to make such intelligence more visible and communicated in ways that might not otherwise be possible (Katz 2015; Osei-Kofi 2013).

It seemed that teachers themselves were also fed by affective intensities operating in the classroom where teachers felt 'innovative' and 'energised'. They constructed themselves as capable teachers but also successful and confident that significant learning was happening in their classrooms. Generally, what emerged from the interviews were affective intensities that worked to shift teachers' professional sense of self.

I go into my classroom and I'm ... happier, just the atmosphere that it's created in my classroom, it's more positive ... for me it's bringing a return to being true to myself and who I am. ... I didn't get into education for a job. I'm passionate about it and I want to make a difference to these kids. (OS2)

It seems likely that what this teacher experienced was potential, energy and excitement with an emerging possibility that could be founded in movement and imagination. Findings such as this resonate with Deleuzian (2004) notions of education as an *encounter* rather than a process, and teaching, as an act of creation.

Watching, listening and working with bodies

Further shifts in perspectives and practice were evident in interview data that indicated the how CBL gave teachers a means to authentically assess learning in ways that extended beyond written tests. For example, one teacher said: 'I know what they are learning because they show and tell me'. Through CBL, teachers were compelled to watch the placement of bodies in space and listen to speaking bodies in order to capture moments of conception and understanding. Collective dialogue during and after strategies was also imbued with thought and feeling such that teachers became more attuned to reading their students' whole embodied selves. In the comments below, one teacher talks of how she came to recognise the understanding of concepts in her students' actions and bodies.

It's so good to see their thinking in their movement and then they apply it in places that you didn't even think about. Sometimes you think they're not giving you an answer because they don't know it but, then they show you. (MD1)

Rather than being restricted to narrowed forms of knowledge acquired through high stakes testing, the reading of bodies as a means of assessment offers opportunities for all students to represent their understanding. Noticeable also was the way teachers acknowledged students as

co-agents in the learning enterprise when working with CBL and the accompanying dialogue generated. As one teacher noted: ‘there is a real shift in their use of language, maths vocab. But (now) they have something to talk about. They have an experience to talk about’ (SW1). Implied here is how CBL provided a shared experience that required both students and teachers to listen with their bodies, feel with their emotions and engage with their critical selves (Deleuze, 2004). Ultimately, this worked towards a collective construction of knowledge informed by their new experiences and funds of knowledge.

A number of teachers in the study talked about ‘good’ teaching in terms of skillfulness in asking D (Describe) A (Analyse) R (Relate) questions that elicited multiple interpretations and generally lots of dialogue from students. During the process of DAR, the role of the teacher became less that of an expert and more of someone who drew collective offerings from students. One teacher spoke of DAR as making ‘teaching and learning more reciprocal’ (LO2). Others witnessed a sense of accomplishment in students as well as a shift in thinking and feeling about mathematics. These signify moments of inclusion for students, particularly those students who are not privileged within normative educational frameworks and align with principles of a ‘universal design for learning’ in creating compassionate learning communities and inclusive practices (Katz 2015). In taking up different subjective positions students could see themselves as capable, clever, and even talented. As one teacher suggested:

There’s gaps in their learning that we just cannot hope to fix and they’re fixing it with each other by these amazing conversations ... they’re building connections with one another...that can help them understand fractions. (OS3)

The ideas represented here are reminiscent of Rancière’s assumption of equality. If alternative forms of knowledge production and communication become valued, the distance between, teacher as expert and student as ignorant, can be challenged. Learning becomes a negotiation where students are active agents and therefore in a position of power.

Discussion and concluding thoughts

In this work conceptual resources around affect, aesthetics and embodiment have provided theoretical grounding for a creative and body-based curriculum approach. In drawing on these generative ideas, argument is made for a critical discourse that acknowledges the body and creativity in terms of capacities, and intensities to feel, sense, respond and imagine.

Combining bodily engagement, artistic endeavour and ritualised reflection, CBL represents an alternative curriculum approach that has potential to mobilise a critical pedagogy and foster inclusion.

Practical implications of CBL were drawn from analysis of teacher interviews within a CBL professional learning project that focussed on teaching mathematics. Emerging from interviews were insights and shifts in subjectivity for teachers as well as their perspectives on the affordances and potential of CBL approaches with their classes. In particular, teacher testimonies marked renewed and broadened pedagogical practices that moved teachers beyond didactic approaches toward more active and creative teaching. So too, in working with the body, potential emerged for teachers to view students holistically and re-engage with fundamental purposes of education beyond the passing of exams and tests.

Shifts for students were seen in terms of their procedural, cognitive and affective engagement with mathematics. Teachers noticed that by engaging in visual, physical and verbal modes of learning, some of their most reluctant students began to take up more positive positions in relation to mathematics. We believe that students could see themselves as ‘learners’ in these contexts because CBL allowed them to demonstrate their learning in a broader range of physical, visual and dialogic ways. Valuing and promoting these performances in an environment where learning was collaborative and failure not demonised also created a sense of community and safer places to take risks. Importantly though, when knowledge is situated in the body it is accessible to all. Feelings, sensations and intensities

drawn from lived and embodied experiences empowered students and fostered a new sense of themselves as learners.

This work contributes to a philosophy of praxis that *embodies* the principles of critical inclusive pedagogy and translates them into teacher action within neoliberal performative contexts. CBL's praxis framework provides potential for both theory and practice to operate in parallel through the use of arts and embodied strategies. It is informed by an ethics of care that supports multiple standpoints and allows students to co-construct knowledge in multiple ways. The strategies work towards understanding through dialogic meaning making where 'deep listening' is vital, for both teacher and student, in order to locate points of intersection that come from diverse student worlds and the standpoints of others. This analogous mode of engagement reconceptualises education as an enactment of social justice that allows for not just access to the academic curriculum but aesthetic and affective transformation, which might just make school 'feel' like a better place to be.

However, what stands out for us is the capacity of CBL to foster experience of the 'whole person', of thinking, feeling bodies and how active affective experiences provide become 'enfleshed' and settle in the body (Franks et al. 2014). Creative and body-based activity combined with dialogue that evokes description, interpretation and connection, represents a complex assemblage of *encounters* in which ideas, concepts and imagination are bound up with action, sensation and learning. These are hopeful, enabling practices (Comber 2014; Katz 2015) that remake a dialectic between the narrative of a critical framework, and the very real practice of inclusion. A pedagogy that emphasises the importance of the affective, sensual and imaginary as modes of understanding provides a different voice to students, the voice of their body. When we attach importance to things young people can feel, see, and sense – they are sure to surprise us.

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