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Transforming the embodied dispositions of preservice special education teachers

Gene Fellner & Helen Kwah

Introduction

The field of teacher education faces an enormous challenge as it seeks to instill in future teachers dispositions that welcome and value differences, whether in race, class, culture, language, or ability. Pre-service teachers in the United States are mostly white and middle class (“Digest of Education Statistics, 2015,” n.d.), and given their race and class their dispositions have been aligned with and reinforced by the depth of their experiences in the field of K-12 schooling (Mills, 2013). However, dispositions characteristic of the field of schooling tend to promote institutional stigmatization and marginalization of difference and result in policies and practices that are disproportionately punitive towards African Americans and students with disabilities (Merkwae, 2015). Pre-service teachers’ prior dispositions toward difference are thus in conflict with those promoted by teacher education programs and they are difficult to transform because of how deeply they are rooted in their experiences (Mills, 2013).

The sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, provides theoretical tools for understanding the tenacity of teacher candidates’ prior dispositions as they comprise the “habitus,” or set of historically and durably embedded dispositions (attitudes, values, and ideas) that a person acquires unconsciously over time through socialization in particular fields of activity and

social life. The dispositions of habitus are embodied, that is to say automatically enacted, through one's postures, gestures, and actions. Bourdieu (2000, p. 172) thus proposed that methods for changing or acquiring a new habitus must include, in addition to explicit pedagogy and reflection, "a thoroughgoing process of counter-training, involving repeated exercises" to transform previously held ways of speaking, moving, and gesturing. By counter-training, Bourdieu meant that habitual dispositions needed to be unlearned and retrained at the bodily level.

As teacher educators, we found Bourdieu's theory compelling since it provided a way to understand the seeming endurance of deficit perspectives toward difference among pre-service teachers despite the explicit pedagogy and reflection that is mandated of teacher education programs ("Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation," 2013). Following Bourdieu's notion of the need to transform habitus at the bodily level, we therefore designed a bodily counter-training activity to challenge Special Education pre-service teachers' communicative habitus and thus make visible the existence of that habitus and the possibility for different yet viable communicative modes. We hoped this experience would help develop dispositions more welcoming of difference.

This paper presents an exploratory case study (Yin, 2013) of a recent implementation of the activity in a class of 17 pre-service Special Education teachers with a focus on three of them who videotaped their thinking as they engaged with the activity and participated in follow-up interviews. Our findings indicate that the activity promoted a breach in their experience of communicative habitus and a receptivity to non-normative modes of communication. Guided pedagogy and reflection, however, were necessary to make the awareness of the communicative habitus salient and to open the

possibility for making a lasting change in teacher dispositions.

Dispositions, their social production, and the field of schooling

The social, historical and bodily inscription of dispositions needs to be taken into account when considering their transformation. Sociological theory offers a useful perspective on how dispositions are produced through interaction with larger social structures, such as gender, race, and class. In particular, the work of Pierre Bourdieu has provided insight for urban school ethnographers (Dickar, 2008; Ferguson, 2001), disability theorists (e.g. DiGiorgio, 2009; Edwards & Imrie, 2003) and other educational researchers (e.g. Grenfell & James, 2003; Reay, 2004) for understanding how the dispositions and practices of the dominant social classes in the field of education are not only (re)produced but also potentially transformed.

Bourdieu used the term *habitus* to describe the set of dispositions, ideas, and practices shared by members of a social group. Individuals acquire the group's habitus through on-going socialization, such that the habitus becomes unconsciously but powerfully maintained by a "two-fold naturalization" through which social constructs are inscribed "in things and in bodies" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 181). The group habitus thus provides a sense of the "rules of the game" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 183), an implicit understanding of how individual members of the group are expected to think, perceive, and act. Bourdieu also theorized that groups are organized by arenas of activity, or fields, in which individuals maintain different positions of power in relation to each other. Family and community are such fields as are teacher education and k-12 schooling. Habitus and field constitute each other, since those whose dispositions align with the

rules of the game of any particular field of activity increase their economic and social capital through their participation within that field. Conflicts can arise when an individual from a social group enters a new field with a habitus that does not align with the new field's habitus. Bourdieu (2003) discussed the example of working class students entering the field of K-12 schooling and not succeeding within that field because of their lack of familiarity (and consequent linguistic and cultural competence) with the habitus of the dominant school culture. Some studies suggest that the desire to enter a new field when the opportunity is available can often, but not always, mediate success in acquiring the set of dispositions necessary for advancement within that field (Colley, James, Diment, & Tedder, 2007; Mu & Ning, 2016), but the process of dispositional transformation is complex and is mediated by many structural and individual conditions and power differentials (Adams, 2006; Colley et al., 2007).

Bourdieu & Thompson (1991) referred to the inscription of group habitus in individual bodies as *bodily hexis*, which refers to how the body becomes organized into durable ways of walking, standing, speaking, perceiving, and thereby feeling and thinking. For teachers, their bodily hexis might include the use of their bodies to convey authority, including the tone and pitch of their voices and “style of speech” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 87), and their physical stance towards students in the classroom. This bodily hexis is “enacted unthinkingly... the result of an experiential schooling stretching back to childhood” (Adams, 2006, p. 514). The linguistic and behavioral communicative expectations teachers might have of their students might include sitting still, *not* speaking out of turn, *not* speaking too slowly, speaking without raising one's voice, making eye contact when speaking, and keeping one's hands and body to oneself – the very

dispositions that were required of teachers when they were students and that became incorporated into their habitus. In addition, communicative norms can include a valuing of written communication, and the use of writing-based conventions for organizing and presenting verbal communication, such as outlines, lists, and bullet points. However, these norms do not always align across abilities or cultures, and studies about students from African-American and Latino communities (Boykin, Tyler, & Oronde, 2005), or students classified with disabilities (Paterson, 2013) have pointed to alternate sets of communicative norms in which volume of speech, vocabulary, ways of sharing information and sense of physicality differ. These differences in expression, whether in physical, sensory, cognitive, emotional/behavioral or a combination of these aspects, seem to viscerally violate the communicative norms within the field of schooling, the collective habitus that joins the dispositions of teachers to the rules of the game within schools.

African-American students from undeserved communities, for example, often communicate in ways unaligned with school expectations (Anderson, 1999). In response, teachers often “shut down” their communicative practices with little more than a look unconsciously delivered (Tobin, 2005, p. 30) that can escalate into exclusion of students of color who are perceived to be disruptive or even threatening because of their prosody or physical posture. The resulting misunderstandings and confrontations have led to the disproportionate suspensions, expulsions, and withdrawals of students of color in schools (US Department of Education, 2014; Dickar, 2008; Ferguson, 2001), all forms of exclusion, and being disproportionately categorized with a behavioral, emotional, learning or intellectual disabilities (Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher & Ortiz, 2010; Skiba, Artiles,

Kozleski, Losen, & Harry, 2016). In the case of students who are physically or cognitively unable to communicate in ways considered normative, “Exclusion takes the form of ... the gestural rejection of the speech-impaired body by the non-disabled body” (Paterson, 2012, p. 172), a bodily “instinct” to move away from individuals seen as deficient. Such a response can lead to exclusionary practices such as self-contained classrooms and labels that define individuals through their deficits.

The complex interweaving of oppressions – race, class, language, and disability (Subini, Connor, & Ferri, 2013) – their internalization in individuals and groups and their institutionalization in schools – invoke the history of oppression in the United States in which differences are demeaned and punished (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995; Winzer, 2007). A 2014 report by the U.S. Department of Education declares that “black students are suspended at a rate three times greater than white students” and “students with disabilities are more than twice as likely to receive an out-of-school suspension... than students without disabilities” (Merkwae, 2015, p. 155). In short, the official enumeration of dispositional values welcoming difference that, in the United States, are incorporated into standards governing accredited teacher education programs (“Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation,” 2013) are too frequently contradicted by a “hidden curriculum” manifested in institutional practices that deprecate difference in the field of schooling.

The field of Teacher Education thus faces the challenge of helping pre-service teachers acquire dispositions that often are contrary both to the fields from which most teachers come and the field of schooling to which they will go once they graduate. The necessary counter-training to develop these new dispositions should ideally take place

during fieldwork in schools that could be designed to “counter the durability of habitus” (Mu & Hu, 2016, p. 92) by raising awareness and then transforming embodied responses to difference. Indeed, studies suggest promising dispositional change is mediated by extensive fieldwork in diverse communities where the schools’ practices and values align with the goals of accredited teacher education programs (Darling-Hammond, Newton, & Wei, 2010; Wiggins, Follo, & Eberly, 2007) though the persistence of these changes still needs to be assessed. Too often, however, fieldwork reinforces, rather than transforms, the habitus acquired by teacher candidates during their own upbringing (Darling-Hammond & Hammerness, 2005).

Transforming dispositions

We believe that only if dispositions welcoming to difference are embodied as teacher habitus do they have a chance of enduring (and maybe transforming) the habitus that currently dominates within the field of schooling itself. For this to occur, teacher education programs need to raise awareness on how dispositions are “embedded in the body... beyond the reach of consciousness” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 182). As Bourdieu suggested, “while making things explicit can help, only a thoroughgoing process of counter-training, involving repeated exercises, can, like an athlete’s training, durably transform habitus” (2000, p. 172). Unfortunately, though Bourdieu saw an embodied counter-training as an essential stage in dispositional transformation, he did not give any detail about what the process entailed, leaving it to others to explore.

In our project, we sought to explicitly address the embodied dispositions of pre-service teachers. In theorizing it, we drew inspiration from the sociological work of

Harold Garfinkel (1964), who found that posing a breach in people's implicitly held social norms, or habitus, was a way to make them visible. In his experiments, Garfinkel and his researchers would typically initiate conversations with unsuspecting participants and then disrupt the interactions with nonsensical responses. Most participants would first respond with anger and confusion, and after, with attempts to "repair" the breach by re-asserting expected social norms for the discourse.

Borrowing from Garfinkel's (1964) method of breaching norms, we designed an activity to not only provoke a "breach" in teacher habitus but also to provide an opportunity for becoming aware of teacher habitus and facilitating a counter-training at an embodied level. The design of the activity and context are discussed in the following sections.

Project design and methods

The Activity

The activity involved three main stages of breaching communicative habitus through an experiential task, reflection on teachers' experiences of the task, and then explicit teaching about the goals of the task with more reflection through discussion. The experiential task was intended to disrupt, at an embodied level, teachers' communicative habitus (set of dispositions) that value norms for speaking and writing and de-value non-normative communication. By engaging with the task and through subsequent stages of reflection and explicit pedagogy, the goal was for teachers to become more aware of their communicative habitus and more open to non-normative communication; i.e., to facilitate a dispositional shift towards valuing difference. In order to enhance the opportunities for

reflection, the activity called for teachers to think aloud as they videotaped their process and then discuss the activity with us while reviewing the video. Because of our limited resources, however, only three volunteer teachers were able to do so; they became our focus participants.

The task itself asked teachers to recall a recent event, and, through the process of remembering and visualizing that event, to “re-experience” the feelings, thoughts, and perceptions that comprised it (see appendix for specific instructions). Teachers were then asked to create series of sounds using everyday objects (e.g., utensils, bottles, paper) to communicate the sense of each of the important moments of the event. Traditional musical instruments (e.g., guitar) were not provided because in previous iterations of this activity we realized that teachers concentrated more on the expertise they associated with their use than on the underlying purpose of the activity. We emphasized that our teachers should not use literal sounds, such as stomping their feet to represent walking or saying “ouch” to signify hurt, to communicate the moments of the event. Rather, we urged them to create sounds that expressed the salient perceptions and feelings or thoughts in the important moments. We hypothesized that a sound composition in which only sounds (no words) would be used for communication would provide a challenge, or “breach” (Garfinkel, 1964) to our teachers’ communicative habitus. We further proposed that the experience of breach and the requirement to produce a sound-only composition would create an opening for teachers to explore the possibilities of different (embodied, non-normative) modes of communication. Accordingly, we expected that the exploration would be an initial experience of counter-training in that teachers would be re-directing their bodies and senses to enact communication in different ways. Our activity, inspired

in part by the work of Christine Sun Kim, a deaf artist who translates sounds into visible movement, and that of Judith Scott, a sculptor who was deaf, with Downs Syndrome and no spoken language, was meant to challenge our pre-service teachers to communicate exclusively in a language that was non-normative for them. Note that the activity was neither meant to model a method for working with students, nor to simulate disability conditions and thereby “trivialize” the experience of disability (Valle & Connor, 2011, p. 19). Neither did we expect only one such activity to result in dispositional transformation. Rather, we hoped it would provide an initial awareness of communicative habitus and an openness to difference that could be built upon during fieldwork experience.

Our teachers were given 25 minutes for creating sounds, after which we asked them to stop and write their reflections about the activity based upon the following questions:

- a. Explain if you found the activity easy or challenging or somewhere in between and why?
- b. Describe your thoughts and feelings about the activity as you worked on it. Did they change?
- c. Did anything about the activity have meaning for your own teaching practice?

After the written reflections were completed, we asked for volunteers to come to the front of the class to perform their sound compositions without explaining their meaning in words. We instructed the audience to listen to the performances for the feelings and sensations that they evoked, and to appreciate them on those grounds rather

than to expect and privilege a verbal explanation of the ‘meaning’ of the sounds. We hoped that avoiding verbal explanations even after the performances would keep the focus on the emotive qualities of sound and thus validate the expressive capacities of sound as a communicative mode even if it was non-normative.

After the performances, we closed the in-class activity with a whole class discussion where we discussed the activity’s purpose and our teachers’ experience with the activity. In the discussion, we also asked teachers to reflect on their experiences with non-normative communication in their classrooms. Five weeks after the in-class activity, we conducted follow-up interviews with three focus teachers. These interviews were based on the expectation that our teachers’ self-conscious viewing of themselves enacting the activity would lead to reflexive awareness when coupled with guided discussion or explicit pedagogy. In addition, the follow-up interviews enabled us to examine whether the activity might result in any longer-term impact on the dispositions of our three teachers.

Participants and context

The activity was implemented in one session of a Special Education Master’s course on literacy methods at the City University of New York in Staten Island. According to the most recent census data (2015), the population of Staten Island is predominantly white (73%) and has a relatively high median income (\$73,197) (“U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts selected,” n.d.), but students of color make up 51% of the student population in Staten Island and those with special needs make up approximately 25% (“NYC Data - New York City Department of Education,” n.d.). The seventeen pre-

service teachers in the course (henceforth referred to as “teachers”) reflect Staten Island’s demographic profile with fourteen white (twelve female, two male), one Latina, one African-American male, and one Asian-American male. Although socioeconomic information was not collected, almost all our teachers were Staten Island residents from middle class neighborhoods as we determined from their guided autobiographical sketches completed at the beginning of the course. In fact, the white female majority and middle class backgrounds mirror the typical demographic profile of teachers across the country (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005) , and indicated that their dispositions (i.e., habitus) as teachers would also tend toward the norm.

All teachers in the class were pre-service for Special Education certification although many were already teaching with General Education certifications. Three teachers from the course, Diane, Alice and Julie (pseudonyms), volunteered to conduct think-alouds (Robb, 2003), which involved video-recording themselves engaging in the activity and talking out loud about their thought process. These three teachers, all white females educated in Staten Island K-12 schools and already certified and working as General Education teachers, became the focus of the case study. Though we didn’t know much about these three teachers, in their autobiographical sketches they had responded to some questions about teaching and learning. Diane expressed that “You get out of life exactly what you put into it. One cannot expect to be successful unless one works hard.” This stance was echoed by most of the students in our class along with the idea, common to the field of schooling, that when students fail it is because of lack of effort. Julie responded to the same question differently, writing that, “Methods and strategies that can work with one child, may not work with another.” Her thoughts about teaching

concentrated less on student work habits and more on instructional strategies. Of the three focus teachers, Alice was the only one to consider the prejudices that teachers bring with them to the profession as mediators of student achievement. She wrote specifically about Special Education, “Sometimes as humans we can be biased, blaming behaviors on the disability that the child may have. To be successful within the realm of planning an intervention we must be open to the possibility of what is causing those behaviors rather than just writing it off as a characteristic of a disability. As teachers, we must act as advocate for those who are unable to advocate for themselves.” She turned out to be one of the few students in the class who intuitively embraced difference in communicative styles.

We (both authors) were the instructors of the classes in which this activity took place and its researchers. Before becoming university professors, we had both worked in inner-city middle schools that overwhelmingly served students of color from low-income households. Many of our smartest and most inquisitive students read below grade level and were routinely suspended from school for intertwined academic and behavioral reasons. We understood these to be mediated by sociocultural and historic structures including systemic racism and poverty, and by a clash between the communicative norms of students and those of educators and institutions. Through our experiences in schools and readings of social theory, we agreed with Bourdieu (2003) that schools could not easily inculcate the necessary dispositions for school success in students who did not already embody them. On the other hand, we believed that teachers should and could work on transforming their own dispositions to better communicate with their students and create learning environments in which students with a variety of dispositions could

succeed. However, when Author One began teaching Master's Special Education teachers, he found it hard to transcend the often deeply entrenched perceptions that mediated their dispositions toward difference and disability despite the many education courses that directly challenged deficit frameworks. Author Two also experienced similar difficulties in her teacher education courses, and both authors shared a focus in their doctoral research on the unacknowledged ways that thought and knowledge are shaped and communicated through gesture and the body (e.g., McNeill, 2005).

Methodology

We based the activity on the proposition that a viscerally embodied experience of difference could provoke a breach in teacher communicative habitus and enable a shift or counter-training of a more positive disposition toward non-normative communication when joined with a subsequent period of guided reflection. Our proposition was shaped by social theories and the goal was to examine not only whether the proposition was viable and borne out through the activity, but also, how and why? A case study approach is especially appropriate for examining such questions (Baxter & Jack, 2008), and we therefore approached our research as a theoretically informed single case study of our activity (Yin, 2013) with boundaries defined around the activity's implementation in stages of provoking breach, exploring non-normative communication, and engaging in reflexive and guided discussions. The units of analysis followed from the definition of the case, and included our three focus teachers' experiences of each stage of the activity (of breach, non-normative communication, and reflexive/guided discussion).

Primary data came from the think-aloud video recordings of the three focus teachers, their written reflections, our video recordings of follow-up interviews conducted with them and our field notes written immediately after the class. Since our case study research questions were theory-driven and sought to build upon existing theory, we took an inductive approach to analysis (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Informed by grounded methods for analyzing qualitative data (Glaser, 2008), we first individually coded the primary data and generated themes from the codes, after which we met together to compare and discuss themes until we arrived at mutual agreement.

Once common themes were identified, we selected events from the primary data of our three focus teachers that served as examples of those themes, and which we could analyze more closely. The salient events were transcribed for speech and significant hand or body gestures and facial expressions. We took a modified microanalytic approach (e.g., McNeill, 2005) for transcribing gestures by recording the occurrence of gestures in relation to speech and describing their visuospatial (and in many cases, auditory) features. For example, the repeated rubbing together of two hands held close to the face by one of our focus teachers created visual, spatial and sonic images of the anxiety that she was speaking about. Our analysis of gesture was informed by David McNeill's (2012) notions that gesture and speech are dialectically interdependent in the process of growing ideas, with the imagery of gesture helping to articulate thinking and verbalization.

The data from implementing the activity with the whole class provided secondary data made up of the teachers' written reflections about the activity, and video recordings of the class during the sound performances and whole class reflexive discussions. We reviewed secondary data through the same process of coding, identifying themes, and

transcribing for speech and gestures after first analyzing our primary data, and compared the themes and findings against those of the primary case data for confirmation or disconfirmation.

Findings

The experiences of Diane, Alice and Julie provided a detailed case view of their engagement with the activity and its impact (over time) on their dispositions to difference. We present our discussion of their experiences and those of the whole class of teachers in terms of the three salient themes that emerged from our analysis: 1) *breaching habitus*, 2) *sensitizing to difference*, and 3) *the role of reflexivity*.

Theme 1: Breaching habitus

The activity was designed from the conceptual proposition that a viscerally embodied experience of difference could cause a breach in teacher communicative habitus and therein enable a dispositional shift when joined with periods of guided reflection. We expected that signs of breach in habitus would include expressions of discomfort or uncertainty about the activity, and attempts to “repair” (Garfinkel, 1996) the breach by reasserting teacher communicative norms.

Of our three focus teachers, Diane seemed to experience the most initial discomfort with doing the activity. The activity called for our teachers to “re-experience” a recent event, and Diane chose the task of doing laundry that she had done that morning. Diane seemed to take a cautious approach to the activity, and did not record her think-

aloud process as we had asked; instead, she first recorded herself performing the finished sound composition, and then recorded herself explaining her choices for each sound.

Diane's anxiety was evident as she performed her sound composition. She started each recording by saying "Hi," and announcing her name, which indicated not only her unease with the assignment but also her reliance on normative classroom communicative practices. As she performed her sounds, she stiffly held her sound-making objects at a distance from her body and produced her sounds mechanically while following a written "script" for her sound composition. Diane later told us in the follow-up interview that she had been concerned about "getting it right." Furthermore, Diane tended to create sounds that were literal representations of actions. For example, she made tapping sounds to represent walking down the stairs, slow tapping sounds to indicate the slowing of the washing cycle, and a few firm loud taps to indicate the machine coming to a stop. In her written reflections, she acknowledged, "I struggled with finding the sounds that best conveyed the event. I tend to work best in situations that are less abstract and more concrete." If the sense of being overwhelmed was a first reaction to a breach of habitus, a second response was to unconsciously repair the breach by reasserting communicative norms. Diane, attempted to repair the breach by relying on a written script and literal sounds to perform her sound composition.

Our second focus teacher, Julie, who chose to re-experience an event in which her principal asked her to lead a professional development workshop, also experienced discomfort with the activity. In her written reflections, Julie stated that, "I found this activity challenging because it was difficult to find the right sounds... for some sounds I kept jumping to literal sounds." Similar to Diane, Julie seemed to "repair" her uncertainty

by resorting to literal sounds to mimic the events of her experience. For example, Julie decided on using the sound from rustling through the pages of a book to convey the feelings of pressure from her “paperwork.” As she commented on later in her follow-up interview, “I was having a war with myself, I remember thinking, but it can’t be literal! I really wanted to represent the feeling of it but I knew I had a lot of paperwork going on.” Julie also, like Diane, seemed attached to the notion of getting the assignment “right.” Her approach to the activity was to describe her event as completely as possible, scene by scene, as if she was delivering a report. This approach indicated a teacher habitus towards verbalization and organized forms of written communication.

Our third focus teacher, Alice, did not experience a breach in habitus. Of all our teachers, she seemed least disoriented by the activity and she did not exhibit any signs of “repair.” Alice chose an event from earlier in the day in the school’s computer lab when she had been bothered by the noise from other people talking. Once she understood what the activity called for, she picked out objects to work with and easily experimented with sound-making. Alice later told us during our follow-up interview that if the activity was about becoming sensitive to “nonverbal communication,” then “we do that all the time.” In other words, she did not see the task of communicating through sounds rather than words to be non-normative, and in this way, Alice’s disposition toward communicative differences was not challenged.

Alice’s ease with the activity contrasted not only with the experiences of Diane and Julie but with the experiences of the majority of our teachers who, like Diane and Julie, reported feeling overwhelmed and disoriented by the activity. One teacher wrote, “The activity was difficult to perform. I could not think. I was extremely nervous. I felt

my heart beating hard and fast the entire time. I did not know what was expected.” Other teachers in the class also voiced how the activity challenged them. One wrote, “I was unsure I would be able to do it at all. Towards the end it made more sense (the sounds I was using), at least to me.” Another wrote, “I found the activity to be challenging! I think that as an adult I can overthink things.”

Indeed, many of the teachers had difficulty avoiding literal sounds to convey their experiences even when they knew that literalness did not convey the feeling of the event. One wrote, “I had a hard time veering away from being literal. Once I started examining and experimenting, I moved away from how I was feeling to the sounds that I heard in my event. I became frustrated when I realized that all of my sounds were literal.” In addition, other teachers resorted to writerly conventions to reassert communicative norms. For example, one teacher organized his reflection on his experience of the activity with numbered steps (see Figure 1).

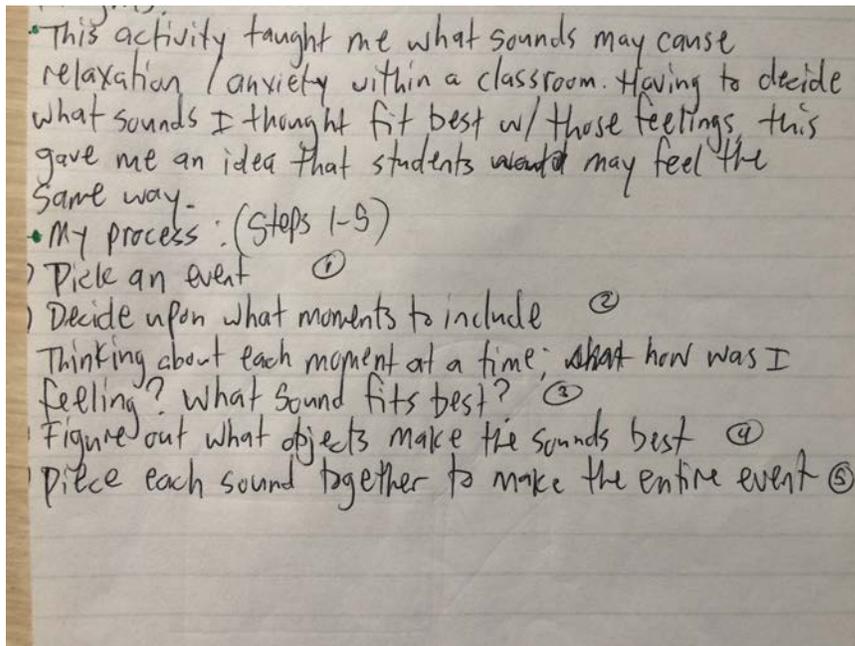


Figure 1

Theme 2: Sensitizing to difference

Bourdieu (2000, p. 148) argued that “the principle of transformation of habitus” depends on mediating the gap between the habitual and the new dispositions. By provoking a viscerally experienced breach in habitual teacher communicative dispositions, we propose that the breach created an opening for teachers to attend to different, non-normative modes of communication with greater sensitivity. For our two focus teachers, Diane and Julie, their initial struggles with the activity seemed to loosen the grip of habitus and initiate a process of mediating between the old disposition and the new one, thus making possible a different way of making sense of their experience. We understand this process to involve sensitizing to difference and thereby to provide a counter-training.

For both Diane and Julie, as they continued in this process, they began to engage their bodies more fully in their attempts to wordlessly communicate the feelings and meanings of their respective events. In Diane’s case, she loosened up when she did not rely on the “script” she had written for performing her sound composition, and she seemed to experience the feelings of her event through sounds, rather than merely using sounds to literally illustrate a verbally conceived event. For example, in her first recording, Diane appeared to perfunctorily flip through the pages of a Post-It notepad to produce “the calming sound of listening to the washing machine,” (Figure 2, left).



Figure 2

However, in her second recording where she explained what each sound meant, she appeared to engage her body more in the performance of the same sound (Figure 2, right) by inclining her head toward the notepad and closing her eyes, as if re-experiencing and embodying her enjoyment of the “calming sound.” As Diane acknowledged in her written reflection, she “began to attain a rhythm” through which it “became easier...to express my thoughts via a series of auditory representations.”

In Julie’s case, she seemed more sensitive than Diane to the experience of emotions through her body and more easily able to use gesture and sound as imagistic modes for thinking (McNeill, 2012) about her event despite her initial tendency toward literal sounds. Once Julie began experimenting with sounds, she was able to identify how she experienced her event through her body – especially the feelings of heat in her cheeks and tingling sensations in her head. While working on a sound to convey her feelings prior to her encounter with her principal, Julie started by rubbing her hands together and pressing them against her cheeks. Her gestures preceded her words, and as researchers of

gesture's role in cognition have argued (Goldin-Meadow, 2003; McNeill, 2005), such gestures provide embodied imagery for thinking before words are consciously accessible. In the recording, Julie brought her hands to her face and closed her eyes first (see Figure 3, below), before launching into her verbalizations:

HOT, HOT, THIS IS HOT to me, my face was warm, it was hot, my face was hot, I was nervous, I was walking down into a basement for a meeting with my principal, and my face was hot [repeats rubbing and pressing], and it was quiet [voice quiets, almost whisper]. This is what I felt [rubbing her hands again], and then I sat down and had this meeting with my principal...



Figure 3

During this period, Julie repeatedly both rubbed her hands and pressed them against her face, and spoke out loud (three times) about how hot or warm her face was. Through the almost manic repetition of the motions and sounds of rubbing her hands and generating heat by her cheeks, Julie successfully created embodied, gestural images of the nervousness and energy she had experienced during her event.

Julie then worked on creating a sound to represent how the principal's praise made her feel happy. Twirling two metal eggbeaters against each other, she closed her

eyes to hear the sound and said, “And I felt this in my head...a tingling sensation.” Again, Julie was specific about the bodily location of the feeling (“in my head”), and held the eggbeaters near her head when listening to the sounds. In fact, Julie seemed to develop her own sound vocabulary, which resonated with her even two months later at our follow-up interview.

I never thought of myself that way, I never thought that I’d be good at choosing sounds that really represented how I feel. And I feel it again, just remembering it. It’s exactly how I felt.

For our third focus teacher, Alice, the process of sensitizing to difference was less relevant since she was already attuned to sensing the qualities of sound and using sounds to re-experience an event. Unlike either Diane or Julie, she was conscious of having a personal sound vocabulary. For example, during her sound experimentation, she picked up a bag with a zipper, and as she moved the zipper up and down (Figure 4), she said, “It’s something I do a lot when I get anxious and kind of reminds me of, ahh, an action I do I guess. I do that, so it’s a familiar sound.”



Figure 4

Again, due to Alice's predispositions, she did not find the activity's task of using movement and sounds as modes for communication to be non-normative, and therefore she did not appear to engage in a process of sensitizing or counter-training of her dispositions.

The experiences of other teachers in the class seemed similar to Diane's and Julie's, rather than to Alice's. In their written reflections, many teachers in the class felt that they were able to open themselves up to the experience of expressing their events through sound. One wrote, "As the activity went on, I calmed down some and listened more carefully to the sounds of my event." Another wrote, "I first found the activity overwhelming, but once I focused, I was able to find the correct items to make the sounds I was looking for.

Theme 3: Role of reflexivity

The activity included different levels of reflection. First, immediately after the activity, teachers wrote reflections in response to a set of questions (see Appendix). Then, we explained and discussed the ideas behind the activity with our teachers through the lens of their experiences with it. During the whole class discussion, some teachers reflected on the connection between the activity and the communicative obstacles their students faced when communicating with teachers. One said:

I work with a teenage boy with an ASD who is non-verbal and also cannot communicate through any other means but hand movements and sounds. I had not thought of his communication in such a way until now.

However, we recognized that our teachers would need more than the single class session and group discussion to reflect on the impact of the activity. In addition, there was no clear way for them to see their own communicative habitus or shifts in disposition (if any) without objective feedback.

These were concerns that we could best address with the three focus teachers during our follow-up interviews with them, two months after the activity took place. These interviews allowed for a deeper level of reflection because our three focus teachers were able to watch themselves in their recordings while we explicitly shared and discussed our interpretations of what we saw in the videos. Both Diane and Julie seemed to benefit from this process and become more aware of their communicative habitus and how they had shifted in their perceptions and attitudes towards the communicative practices of their students.

In reviewing Diane's video together, we suggested to her that her first narration of her event aligned with her default teacher practice whereas her second rendition showed a new sensitivity to embodied communication, Diane agreed and excitedly took over the explanation:

GF: Here when you say you're making the bell sound, you're not just hitting this (glass beaker) but actually your whole...

D: *the body language, yeah...*

GF: body moved...

D: *Yup, yup! I think I was actually making a bell sound. I don't know if it makes sense to you, but I literally was feeling the bell! I was going through the experience of feeling the bell!*

Diane was thus able to see herself in a new light, recognizing both her habitual teacher practice and the possibility of communicating differently. Though initially, in her written reflections, she thought of the activity as a method to be used with students, she now thought the activity helped her become more sensitive to her students' communicative obstacles:

I have a student who has trouble doing more than one thing at one time, when she's listening to you she can't look you in the eye, like a processing disorder. And so many of the students where I work ... they all pretty much have processing disorders, so I think the activity was useful for understanding that.

Through watching the video recordings together, Julie also became more conscious of how much she experienced communication through her body, which allowed her to recognize this embodied communication as meaningful though different than what she had previously viewed as valid communication. Interestingly, when we watched the segment of the video in which Julie was twirling the eggbeaters near her head, she nodded forcefully and began to mimic her motions by twirling imaginary eggbeaters in her hand. She commented:

Watching the video, I feel it [the experience] again, going through that. Those sounds, they're exactly how I felt. It's just interesting to see that and see the communication! It's definitely opened my eyes, doing this activity and then speaking to the both of you.

Julie was thus able to re-experience her event through sound and bodily movement and develop a personal "sound vocabulary," Furthermore, like Diane

and many of the teachers in our class, Julie thought that her new sensitivity to the possibilities for communicating non-normatively enabled her to be more sensitive to the different and embodied ways her students might communicate. She told us, “Before, especially when my students are trying to explain themselves, I found myself getting really frustrated, ‘C’mon, just say what you have to say.” In sum, Julie found that the follow-up session helped her to articulate and enhance her understanding of the activity.

The follow-up session including watching the video recordings together was less useful for Alice since she thought that the use of non-verbal communication, by her as well as students, was “obvious.” Consequently, she did not find the activity useful in generating greater sensitivity for the ways that her students might communicate:

GF: So do you think this activity maybe raised your awareness of the possibilities of communicating in modes that don’t rely on words?

A: Not really. I’ve always been aware of using body language to communicate. I mean we do it all the time.

GF: And when you are with your students, are you aware that their gestures, for example, may have meaning for them even if you don’t understand them?

A: Yeah. I mean it just seems obvious.

Given that Alice was already attuned to what she termed, “body language,” she did not respond to the activity as a challenge to her own or classroom norms for communication. The chance to watch her video recordings or discuss them together did

not seem to generate any new understanding for Alice as there was no noticeable dispositional shift.

Summary

The design of this activity was based upon Bourdieu's idea that dispositions cannot be durably transformed without a bodily counter-training. We posited that posing a breach in teachers' default communicative habitus, would create an opening for such a counter-training to take place. Since habitus is maintained through bodily practices, we looked to the body and material actions for manifestations of breach. In particular, we identified physical expressions of discomfort with the activity and material attempts to reassert norms as indications of an experience of breach (Garfinkel, 1964).

Verbal acknowledgements of discomfort in the written reflections of many of our teachers and in two of our three focus teachers provided evidence of discomfort with the activity on a conscious level. In the video recordings of our focus teachers, however, we indeed observed *unconsciously* enacted physical expressions of discomfort with the activity. We interpreted these physical expressions as evidence of unconsciously maintained dispositional norms and an inscribed resistance to alternative communicative modes. The video recordings of Diane and Julie, and the written reflections of all the teachers provided evidence of two forms of repair of breach: the use of literal sounds and of writerly forms of organization. According to our proposition then, these teachers should have become open to a counter-training experience, though we did not know how this experience would manifest itself.

The think-aloud video recordings of our focus teachers allowed us some view of how a process of counter-training could take place. In Julie's and Diane's recordings, we observed that as they continued to engage with the activity, they discovered that they could use sounds to express the meaning of their experiences, even if no one else could make sense of them. Julie even developed a sound vocabulary that continued to resonate with her months after the activity had been completed. Recognition of their capacity to communicate meaning in non-normative ways sensitized them to the legitimacy of alternative communicative modes in their students. Theoretically, these findings support our proposition that, following an initial stage of repair of norms (Garfinkel, 1964), the experience of a breach in habitus may facilitate dispositional change.

Our activity thus served as an initial counter-training with the potential to mediate dispositional transformation when that embodied sensitizing – visible in the video recordings – became consciously recognized through reflexivity and explicit pedagogy. Bourdieu theorized embodied knowledge, reflexivity, and explicit pedagogy as dialectically intertwined and necessary partners in the process of dispositional transformation. An important lesson for us was that the video recordings in which embodied transformation could be witnessed were crucial tools for advancing the reflexive and pedagogical steps to make visible the sensitizing that occurred during the activity.

Implications, limitations and conclusion

For this activity, the race and gender of our teachers, overwhelmingly white, female, and from middle-class backgrounds matches the typical demographic profile of

teachers (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). This is a strength of our study since the dispositions of our teachers could be assumed to align with those of most teachers in the field of schooling. In the case of our activity, we were focused on communicative habitus and among many of our teachers we found communicative dispositions that seemed aligned with the field of schooling, including the valuing of verbal communication and didactic ways of speaking and presenting information. We acknowledge that implementing this activity with teachers from diverse backgrounds, including teachers of color and teachers with disabilities, might enrich our understanding of the many structures that mediate dispositions toward difference.

We also recognize that not all teachers either need or will be disposed to the type of habitus-breaching activities that we attempted to implement. Alice, one of our focus teachers, seemed intuitively open to differences in communicative norms and did not find our activity useful or compelling. In this regard it is always essential to remember that making assumptions about any individual based merely on demographic data flattens out multidimensional human beings. Dispositions are not solely defined by membership in one particular field, and teacher education programs might profit from purposefully recruiting teachers who are already open to difference.

We also note that the field of schooling is not uniform, and maybe our greatest chance of transforming the habitus of teachers is through fieldwork in schools that practice openness to difference and in which teachers themselves are diverse. However, the embodied nature of habitus and the structured oppressions against differences in race, class, language, and disability (Subini et al., 2013) make dispositions difficult to transform unless their unconscious production is exposed on the level of the body. We

believe that the promise of fieldwork-based teacher education could be enhanced with recognition of how dispositions are inscribed on the body and enacted through embodied behavior.

Our activity called for video recordings, think-alouds and interviews, and these played an essential role in helping our teachers become aware of their communicative habitus. Engaging all teachers in this process would be time-consuming; however it could be integrated at the beginning of a fieldwork practicum. In some teacher education programs – e.g., States in the U.S. that follow the edTPA certification standards – teachers are already required to videotape their classroom practice and review the video recordings with a practicum supervisor. These recordings could all provide opportunities for teachers to become more aware of their habitus and the ways habitus is embodied.

Given the durable nature of habitus, it would have enriched our study if we followed our pre-service teachers over at least the first few years of their teaching career to see if our project mediated any sustained changes in their dispositions; indeed a follow-up study is a possibility. Future studies should also include more participants conducting videotaped, think-alouds and interviews and be longitudinal in scope. Furthermore the observable discomfort with the activity that we theorized as evidence of breach might be more clearly established through physiological measures, but such methods were beyond the scope of our study.

Though there were limitations to our design, we hope that its theoretical exploration of the embodied basis for pre-service teacher dispositions will inspire others to find appropriate approaches to address this basis. We encourage further research that

explores other approaches toward targeting deficit views at the foundational level of the body.

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