

# DIRTY SECRETS AND SILENT CONVERSATIONS:

EXPLORING RADICAL LISTENING THROUGH EMBODIED AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC TEACHING.

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## *Abstract*

In this article I explore the connections between radical listening, autoethnography and embodied pedagogy. Using my own experiences (and the context of patriarchy) as an example, I utilize layered narratives and theater metaphors to highlight the ways that listening in pedagogical spaces, can include listening to bodies and their histories. I examine the intricacies of creating a space for listening when the insights that come from the body are deeply personal.

*Keywords:* Autoethnography, radical listening, embodied knowledge, college teaching, patriarchy

## BACKSTAGE 1: STAGE DIRECTIONS

All the world's indeed a stage. And we are merely players. Performers and portrayers.

Each another's audience. Outside the gilded cage. (Rush, 1981)

In this article I explore listening from the perspective of a 'performer and portrayer,' researcher, teacher-educator, and autoethnographer. I examine how a radical listening that focuses on corporeality can be an integral part of post-enlightenment teaching (and argue that this approach may be particularly valuable when teaching about social justice). Throughout this work I use narrative form and theater metaphors (leading readers through stage directions and multiple chronological spaces, and using 1<sup>st</sup> person and 3<sup>rd</sup> person perspectives) to weave together the texts and metatexts. I combine autoethnographic inner voices (as a child, and an adult), exterior teaching voice, and a scholarly more 'objective' voice. Ultimately, I explore how using personal and embodied stories in teaching may require specific forms of radical listening.

I begin by offering a glimpse of my teaching.

### SCENE 1: CLASSROOMS AND MEMORIES

How does paying attention to our bodies change what we look at, how we look, what we ask, and what we choose to represent? (Pillow, 1997, p. 349) Empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks. (hooks, 1994, p. 21)

*Myself, actor/professor: Her voice is calm and strong, (she has been told by students that they wish they had her confidence). She knows this game. She gauges the crowd (her classroom) looking for inattentiveness, curiosity, fidgeting. She is paying close attention to timing, cadence, volume, pitch. She carefully measures the amount of information given at any moment. She notes the give-and-take between the students, and scans for micro expressions... Preparing for this teaching moment she has spent many nights crafting PowerPoints. But she knows that once the class begins there is no script. This is not theater; this is dance. Dance with me through the data, she thinks, still*

*talking, lead and follow until we are fluent with terms, ‘patriarchy’, ‘oppression’, ‘systemic racism’... Her voice rings out, “So as we look at these numbers we can start to see the ways that patriarchy operates as a system. To apply Peggy McIntosh’s idea we can start to see sexism (like racism) not as “individual acts of meanness” but as “invisible systems conferring unsought dominance from birth.” So, let’s think about some of these variables in terms of power... according to the National Organization of Women (NOW) approximately 600 women a day in the U.S. are sexually assaulted, women ages 20-24 are at the greatest risk. The U.S. Department of Justice estimates about 44,000 women a year in the U.S. experience rape or sexual violence with over 1,600 intimate partner homicides a year (approximately 5 times the rate of men). The Human Rights Watch has noted dramatic recent increases in the incidences of domestic violence, rape, and sexual assault\* ...*

*Inside: Listening to the heartbeat of the professor. My heartbeat. I tell myself that I am calm, I am confident, my stomach is not knotted, my voice is not cracking. Is my voice cracking? Can they hear my fear? Of what? Is it shame? Is it judgment? Is it sexuality? (You have no business bringing this topic here Carolyne, this is a teacher education classroom for Gods sake!) Is it self-indulgence to speak of these things? Can I keep mouthing confident words while this inner dialogue rages? I am calm, I am confident. I am not a mess of insecurity and doubt. I am calm, I am calm, I am calm...*

Though I might appear powerful woman to the world, this did little to change the way in which I, like many other women, was infantilized... But that is not all there is to say... We are not simply positioned, like a butterfly being pinned into a display board. We struggle from one position to another and, indeed to break free – But to what? (Walkerdine, 1990, p. xiii)

I did not at the time appreciate the possibility of systematic parallels of life experience and political reality illuminating both. In other words, I was not prepared to answer the question, “Exactly how is the personal political?” (Reagenspan, 2014, p. xxi)

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\*References are listed in the reference page but not in-text for authenticity.

*The professor continues: “If I were to ask you, in your groups, to talk about these numbers (the demographic evidence) we are studying, in terms of your own lived experience, I know that every table in this room would have a story to share. You carry your own stories, and/or those of a friend, neighbor, roommate, ‘girl in your other class’ who was assaulted, or beaten, or is quietly self-destructing by throwing up in bathrooms. I know this because the numbers are compelling. Amazingly (and tragically) for all the social progress we may have made, the statistical evidence of violence against women is still significant. And these numbers we study, they are not just numbers; they are your stories. And my story.*

*The professor pauses before continuing: “I was one of those numbers of college students sexually assaulted. And I said nothing. Looking at the research now, I know that you (broadly speaking) are doing exactly what I did. You (like I) say nothing. You (like I) are not talking publically. You are starting conversations late at night with “please don’t tell anyone about this, but...” You are swallowing the hurt. You are silent. As I was. As many of my generation still are. Shame silences us. Maybe that is because we fear the idea of our bodies as a public text or we fear that to be powerless is to be unworthy of respect. So we struggle alone. As an undergraduate, all those years ago, I did what I know you do, I tried to just keep going. But I was suddenly not doing so well in school... I will not leave you room to talk about this here\*. I do not want anyone to be made unsafe. But I want to ask you to think about the implications of this silence for yourselves as teachers.”*

*I scan expressions. What do I see in these student’s faces? Is this helping? Would this disclosure have helped me? I am remembering myself at 19...*

*Flashback: Age 19. College. Sexual assault number one: Home again, in the dark, sitting on the floor with the lights out, rocking in a corner of the room. Trying not to shake. Maybe I’ll quit school. Maybe I’ll just drink. Buy multiple bottles of vodka. Try it for breakfast... Don’t much like being drunk. Can’t concentrate but I still prefer school*

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\*I repeatedly make sure that all of my students are aware of free campus counseling services.

*to the bottle. At least I can stop my hands from shaking in class. It is reassuring to not tremble at least some of the day. Plummeting grades. Sexual assault number two: Spiraling into inner darkness. Holding it together publically, falling apart privately. Maybe I can beg for a grade, please, please, please, Professor, can you just give me a “D”?*

*Three years later, I am on the phone to a Rape Crisis Center. “Please tell me, it is three years, will my hands stop shaking when I am alone and no one sees me? Three years is a long time, will this ever go away?” A soothing voice murmurs something reassuring. But I am not buying it unless I have proof, so please tell me, reassuring lady on the phone, “Did this happened to you? Did you get over it to function normally? Did your hands shake too?” Please tell me... I need that reassurance. (No reassurance comes.) There is no personal disclosure, only professional distance. I don’t trust distance. I stop calling. At some point my hands don’t shake anymore, but I become deeply self-destructive. And I soon have bigger problems to worry about than shaking hands. Years pass.*

## **BACKSTAGE 2: SILENT LISTENING: REFUSING THE PEDAGOGIES OF VULNERABILITY**

We suggest here that the visible and invisible dimensions of human life, including representations of bodies, work together to create social order as we know it. (Casper & Moore, 2009, p. 4)

In my teaching I question how personal stories contribute to the “social order as we know it.” What does it mean for me to teach using narrative representations of my body (silencing some inner voices, and pushing others into public spheres)? I have come to the surprising realization that sometimes making visible and opening the space for speech can contribute to rather than prevent harm. Telling stories about a body can no doubt challenge the social order in ways that are liberating, but speaking/hearing a body’s truth, in and of itself does not guarantee any challenging of social order, (even if the truth offered comes from a position of oppression). Sometimes stories about the “invisible dimensions of human life” can divide, rather than unite listeners and cement, rather than break down, hierarchies. Robin DiAngelo and Özlem Sensoy (2009) are instructive as they discuss the power

dynamics of dominant voices in social justice classes. They argue that dominant discourses/voices can work to intimidate and silence others. They point out that students may need time to digest ideas before they speak in response to them, and so instructors might be well advised to specifically disallow student speech. Mindful of this, I am firm in sometimes requiring students to use their inner voices and (hopefully) listen, as I “make visible” discomfoting information. “*I will not leave you room to talk about this.*”

The idea that teaching may involve shutting down student voices is not a popular one. But its opposite is. For example, in the film *Freedom Writers* (2007), the protagonist savior-teacher (Erin Gruwell) has her students engage in an activity in which they answer personal questions about their lives: “Step up to the [masking tape on the floor] line if anyone you know has been shot” (she orders them). “More than one person? More than two?...” The plot confirms that this allowed Gruwell to learn about ‘life in the hood,’ while students learned about each other’s grief. Although *Freedom Writers* presents a predictable, stereotyped, and dark view of ‘urban’ neighborhoods,\* it is popular in teacher education, and Gruwell was the 2007 keynote speaker for the American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education. My fellow teacher educators sometimes use *Freedom Writers* in their courses, and this may explain why K-12 schools in the district I teach in use similar activities to the one described. Some preservice teacher students report that they participate in a school ‘spirit day’ during which classes are suspended and children are required to engage in activities that are remarkably close to Gruwell’s “step-up/step back.” My student teachers react positively to these events. I do not.

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\*As a side note, Chela Delgado (2011) offers a compelling critique of this film, pointing out that making minority youth study the Holocaust (as Gruwell has them do) in order to understand the concept of oppression, is yet another example of the privileging of one history over another. I offer similar critiques in looking at *Dangerous Minds* (Ali-Khan, 2011).

## **“STEP-UP/STEP-BACK” VS. “I WILL NOT LEAVE YOU ROOM TO TALK ABOUT THIS”**

I am unnerved by the pedagogies of vulnerability that are the stuff of feel-good teacher movies. Although getting to know students is fundamental to good teaching, and teaching should (I believe) embody an ethic of care (e.g. Noddings, 2013), I have come to believe that there are multiple reasons why sometimes in order to enact that care, we must close the door to speech and leave no room for discussion. In this instance to ask students to publically disclose lived experiences of oppression and trauma, as Gruwell does, is simply an abuse of power. In many ways this is an example of well-intentioned pedagogy paving the road to hell. It looks (as so many diversity activities also do) caring and engaged, yet is deeply coercive and lacks pedagogical substance. What it does not lack is the ability to operate as a beautiful ‘moment’, a feel-good-doing-good spectacle that is similar to walking around statues chanting for peace or wearing rubber bracelets for a cause. Although these may be ontologically comforting acts (as we get to feel good about ourselves through bonding with other, usually more oppressed, groups), these gestures are axiologically vapid. When the show ends we all go home to our nice beds. The work is done and nothing more needs to happen.

In K-12 settings, the problem of exploiting student emotion is compounded by adultism; i.e., the inequitable distribution of power that favors adults (Kivel, 2006). The privileging of adult needs and perspectives in schools often combines with a vilification and distrust of children and youth, (Giroux, 2009; Lesko, 2001; Porfilio & Carr, 2010) which positions children poorly. As children are captive in the school setting, they already have little agency or control over the activities and instruction that they participate in. Children who engage in pedagogies that require them to disclose personal information are additionally forced to be publically vulnerable.

With this in mind, I caution my teacher education students to consider that emotional safety may be severely compromised by a moment of disclosure. As Omar Khayyam noted 900 years ago, words are not easy to undo “...nor all thy Piety nor Wit, Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line, Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it” (1898, p.

22). I ask students to question what might happen when school-based activities that require naming trauma cause old hurts to surface, in schools underequipped with counselors? When bullying occurs after personal beliefs, practices or identities have rendered students vulnerable? When private information travels, despite classroom confidentiality rules? I caution them to remember that sometimes it is better to not leave room for discussion. Some conversations need to happen in silence as we listen to inner voices and work through emerging understandings. *“I will not leave you room to talk about this.”*

### **BACKSTAGE 3: MIMETIC LISTENING**

John Berger argues that “we never look at one thing, we always look at the relation between the thing and ourselves” (1972, p. 9). I share my autoethnographic stories precisely because I share similarities with the majority of my students. I am female, an educator and a woman (as are most teacher educators). Therefore I present my history as a relational thing to be looked at (one that is possibly parallel to, or resonant with theirs). As my disclosures are accompanied by statistical realities (numbers on sexual assault, etc.) they are intended as an invitation for students to reflect on the relations between three variables: 1. Their life experiences (or those of friends and family). 2. My life experiences. 3. The systems of patriarchy, race, and class that house all of these lived moments. It is my hope that this facilitates in students, multiple levels of abstraction and pushes them to develop critical understandings (i.e. understandings about the circulation of power) that can connect micro, meso, and macro-perspectives.

To be specific: On a micro-level, students are given access to the visceral/interior immediacy of feelings and responses (both long and short term) through hearing first-person experiences. On a meso-level they are given the information that allows them to place these lived moments of oppression in a cultural context. On a macro-level they have access to statistics that verify the existence of patriarchal structures that normalize violence against women. By crafting a multilayered radical listening, I hope to evoke relational insights and to provoke new understandings about the ways that oppression is structured.

I find it tricky to ask students to consider oppression (in this example, patriarchy) as not only a body of data but also as lived, and trickier still to present of myself as an example. In order to be effective (and not just self indulgent) I present my body as a text to be actively read. Dalia Judovitz describes active reading as that “governed by the mimetic relation of the reader to the text” (2001, p. 152). I seek - through performance, prose, pitch, tone and gesture - to pull students into a lived moment. By definition this stretch toward mimesis necessitates imagining and critical consciousness. Robert Lake (2010) explains the relationship between listening, critical consciousness and meaning making, “[i]f we are critically conscious, we will see ourselves in the story of others, which in turn enables us to see beyond external abstractions of humanity...” (p. 43). Similarly, Mary Jo Maynes, et. al. (2008) argue that personal narratives create the space for intersubjective understandings by “tapping into subjective takes on the world” (p. 2).

As a caution, I believe it is important to note that inviting students to mimesis and intersubjectivity must always involve understandings of the triad of power, positionality and vulnerability. 1. Power: The recognition that I have more power than my students (and I have no right to invade their privacy). 2. Positionality: The understanding that I (unlike my students) can operate from a safe space as I am (by and large) temporally, geographically and emotionally, able to be removed from the possible ill effects of personal disclosure. 3. Vulnerability: The knowledge that I cannot foresee the unintended consequences of student responses to sensitive information, therefore the only person I can ethically make fully vulnerable is myself. Reflecting on these I realize that an invitation to mimesis necessitates rethinking relationships between texts (particularly embodied texts) and students, and a recrafting of how I encourage listening in the light of concerns about power and powerlessness.

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\*I think it is important to also note Angela Mcrobbie’s (2009) point that women often undermine their proficiency and expertise by playing the role of subjugated woman. As I present my stories of experiencing patriarchal oppression I cannot rule out this action/unconscious motive on my part, nor this interpretation by my students.

## SCENE 2: BEING VULNERABLE - (IN THE VOICE OF A CHILD)

Where does one situate the event that is experience? In the past that is narrated or in the presence of its interpretation? (Pitt and Britzman, 2003, p. 759)

*I was 11 years old the first time I was sexually molested. It was a small moment, in the life of a small person. My parents could not find a baby sitter. Worried about leaving me alone, they took me with them to the party. At the party I needed a bathroom. The bathroom was in a bedroom suite, I walked in and saw a man on the bed laughing, surrounded my laughing women, clothed but disheveled. Laughing, tumbling. The lights go out before I find the bathroom, someone leads me to the bed, a woman's hands are on my shoulders gently pushing me forward. Then someone is running their hands over my body, I think it is the man. I am terrified. I freeze. I am being asked to come and join on the bed. Someone tells the man to let me go, I am just a child. More laughing. The lights come on. I still need to pee. Run to the bathroom. Sprint out of the room, heart pounding. They don't seem to care, they aren't looking at me as I run. Laughing again they are engrossed again in the bed...*

Writing this my tenses slip, tripping me up, past to present. That is sloppy Carolyne. Bad grammar. You hate bad grammar!

*Run to Mum. Heart racing. "A man turned the lights out, had his hands on me Mum! Over there! In the bedroom" ... "Hold my hand darling. Stay with me and you will be safe. Don't worry. I am with you now" ... "Just me. Don't say anything to your father. Your father will kill him. I have you now ... Just stay with me" ...*

My mother gave me a thousand acts of kindness, a hundred thousand acts of love. She taught me everything that makes my life good and happy. She loved me more than life itself. Cared for me with all that she had. Was devoted. Passionate. Intense. It is a debt I can never repay... But still, but still, but still. I remember being 11, scared and learning to not rock the boat. *Years later, I confided to my mother that the boyfriend I had just left had physically hurt me, "Do you still love him?" she asked. "Yes, Mum." "Then forgive him. Go back. Love is too rare." Feeling my heart sink. Feeling sick.*

## INTERLUDE: A VIEW FROM THE RAFTERS

THIS IS PATRIARCHY. Patriarchy is men being taught that they have rights over women's bodies. Patriarchy is women not being able to protect themselves/ourselves from violence. Patriarchy is not being able to protect our daughters, who we love more than ourselves. Patriarchy is always forgiving, because he really didn't mean any harm. And he doesn't mean harm. (As if that made a difference.) Patriarchy is forgetting that intent and impact are not synonyms. Patriarchy is not knowing that as women, we matter too.

### BACKSTAGE 4: YOU CAN'T SAY THAT HERE!

“Disciplinary, interdisciplinary, cross disciplinary. What we really need in academia is to be less disciplined!” (Cartwright, 2015, personal correspondence) Still troubled, some would continue: “There are things that just should not be shared.” And I would ask: “What of the human condition should be kept hidden?” Research is not therapy! It is not a narcissistic display! What time to come from using the self to display what might be therapeutic? Who benefits from such hidings? Why must we work under an epistemology of ‘not that’? (Pelias, 2004, p. 8)

As a teacher-educator and researcher I too ask myself “what should not be shared?” I find the most compelling answers come from scholars like Ronald Pelias and Keith Cartwright, who remind me that knowledge production needs to be close to the bone of the human condition (messy complex and undisciplined as that may be). Critical and post-colonial theorists agree that we need raw, subjective, anti-enlightenment, anti-logocentric, undisciplined voices to push through in academic space (e.g. Kincheloe, 2003; Kress, 2011) and remind us to pay attention to the relationship between physical, emotional, material and political realities. Feminists have long maintained that the personal is political and have fought for the idea of the body as a site of meaning in institutional spaces (e.g. Hanisch, 1970; Lorde, 2003). Bringing these insights into schools, bell hooks critiques the way that teachers are encouraged “to teach information as though it does not emerge from bodies” (1994, p. 139). She argues that teacher silencing of insights about the signification of bodies (e.g. white, black, female,

able etc.) “perpetuate(s) the hierarchies they seek to dismantle” (p. 142). In sum, our bodies are not pedagogically neutral space (even though we may treat them as such).

Aligned with critical pedagogy, I shun the idea of ‘neutral knowledge’, and seek ways to reduce the pain in the world by connecting words to material realities (thereby - hopefully - increasing the possibility of action). In my work I frequently utilize autoethnography (e.g. Ali-Khan, 2015). But the everyday dangers of exposing myself as ‘subjective’ and ‘unscholarly’ that arise in using *my* body as the body in question in *research* are multiplied in teacher education *classrooms*, where students not only expect “objective” “dispassionate” “facts” about the world (and are taught to take for granted a separation of cognition from feeling), but have also been specifically trained to fear their own bodies. Historically this fear has a long precedent. Again hooks explains, “the teacher’s physical body, especially if it is female, (had to) be ‘erased’ to privilege the body of knowledge she is supposed to transmit” (as cited in Atkinson, 1994, p. 112). This tension is increasingly evident in schools today as brain-on-stem logic leads to recess being cut, art, music and theatre programs demolished and extra time mandated for test preparation. The lack of care of the body in schools also reflects long-standing class prejudice wherein physicality, emotion and passion (i.e., signs of embodiment) are understood to signify subordinate and uneducated positions. Yolanda Medina (2012) joins scholars who note how, “(class based) social imperative(s) can create a classroom environment in which it is deemed inappropriate to express one’s feelings...” (p. 33).

### SCENE 3: IN THIRD PERSON

Behind the scenes, the halls of my university echo with the hushed stories of students whose feelings are center-staged in their lives (but hidden from public view). Each semester students and former students come to my office, confessing trauma and hardship (Ali-Khan, 2015). They often cry. Their hands shake. They breathe haltingly. Their stories reconnect emotion, bodies and intellect as they try to reconcile the intrusions of embodiment in an institution built for cerebral pursuits. They struggle to not let the physical and emotional facets of their lives

overwhelm their intellectual abilities. Their stories illustrate how much our bodies intrude upon our lives (Carless, 2010). I do not know if these students feel safe confiding in me because I share publically and ‘inappropriately’ in class. But I suspect that refusing ‘the epistemology of not that’ while pushing to create spaces for a radical interior listening may contribute to a climate of safety. These young people have made me aware of how much we need our bodies to be heard. They have forced me to see that despite my personal and intellectual discomfort, I need to seek ways to not be silent about the centrality of ‘the body’ (my body and theirs) to teacher education.

## **STAGE DIRECTIONS: TEACHING AS A PHENOMENOLOGICAL PROJECT**

...the *other* is not just a boundary that we cross from time to time; the *other* is always within us. (Briscoe, 2005, p. 30). For me, the first person present is the most immediate experience one can have with a text. It allows the reader to walk in the shoes of the subject being (re)presented, which is the phenomenological project in a nutshell. (Waldman, 2015, p. 333)

Phenomenological projects begin with the self in the world. The horizons of being and meaning making intersect as macro, micro, and meso worlds mesh. Phenomenological projects forefront the subjective and lived experience. They can seduce us with their immediacy, highlight the complexity of navigating multiple identities and unmask the way that the sense making that we arrive at contorts into coherence a far more complex world. To understand teaching as a phenomenological project involves listening to myself as a physical entity in the classroom. This form of radical listening asks me to pay attention to my own contradictions and chaos and to the silent cacophony of emotions, gestures and feeling.

### **SCENE 4: A BODY WILLFULLY CONTAMINATED!**

The reason/emotion dichotomy fosters the illusion of dispassionate reason - reason purified of any bodily contamination by feelings (Johnson, 2008, p. 14)

*A new year, walking into college classrooms I silently revisit ideas about disembodiment in my teaching praxis. My questions never fully resolve... Is it possible to teach about racism, sexism, classism (not only as statistical realities) but as the physical, material and experiential spaces that I knew so well? Can I do this without compromising my credibility? How can I refuse the tyranny of dispassionate reason without 'losing' students who expect knowledge to be 'objective'? As a woman teaching diversity I am already repeatedly dismissed as 'opinionated'...*

Over and over I remind myself that the risks are worth it. I remind myself to never again leave my body at the door. It is after all a “dangerous idea, so deeply rooted in western culture, that purity of mind entails rising above one’s bodily nature” (Johnson, 2008, p.7).

*I see the bodies of children shackled to desks (no art, no play, no music, no touch for you! Side hugs only!) I see the ache of hunger in cities where academic testing matters more than food insecurity. I see women, indigenous peoples, elders, teenagers, artists pushed aside in panopticon school spaces, “Too physical! Too emotional! Your knowledge is not welcome here.” Dreaming, I see the footprint of biopower tattooed my chest.*

## **BACKSTAGE 5: BIOPOWER**

According to Michel Foucault, biopower consists of the regulatory ideologies and disciplines that render bodies (particularly bodies in institutions) as pliant, compliant and docile (Rabinow, 1991). I know this compliance in my bones. As a K-12 educator I was (like my peers) well-versed in the disciplines of docility and the rules of biopower. I knew to police my dress, gestures, speech, and bladder. I understood how much the institution of school required self-regulatory corporeal practices. As I matured in my praxis, I chafed and increasingly rebelled against these norms. But my individual rebellion did nothing to change the system. And nowhere are the mechanisms of biopower more clearly visible to me than they are now in teacher education programs.

At my university, teacher education students are terrorized into believing that professionalism literally lives between their toes. Flip-flops, bra-straps and body piercings are just a few of the carnal sins

on a long list of supposedly ‘unprofessional’ dress and behavior. The social class biases of these rules, as well as the irony of telling new teachers to ‘embrace diversity but look identical’, appears to be lost on the enforcers of ‘professional’ dress codes. Female teachers (in particular) are prone to worry that their bodies might compromise their professionalism (Strickland as cited in Atkinson, p. 112, 2008). Teachers are simultaneously expected to police the bodies of children, in particular girls, who must be given the message that their bodies are unimportant (‘it’s not how you look, it’s who you are’) while also being told that they will be carefully physically scrutinized for dress code violations. All of this works in tandem with strict gender policing around physical movement, which often begins in kindergarten (Martin, 1998). In sum, bodies in schools are dismissed through the use of narratives that insist ‘we’re all the same, it doesn’t matter what race you are’, etc. while being simultaneously foregrounded, scrutinized and disciplined\*. For teachers, messages about acceptable corporeality include the idea that ‘professionalism’ necessitates constant self-scrutiny, worry and control. Overt signifiers of ‘modesty’ are expected and signifiers of teacher sexual innocence must be constantly maintained. In short the message is, ‘leave your body at the door.’ Physicality is a thing to be feared.

It is against this backdrop that Atkinson asks educators to “interrogate relationships among embodiment, innocence, social control, and social justice” (p. 21). But the stakes for doing this are high (particularly for new/female) teachers who face the twin risks of being labeled rule-breaking *and* being seen as mere feeling beings rather than competent professionals. Under these circumstances to question the very need for a narrative of teacher innocence and/or to challenge the wisdom of logocentrism is to engage in subversive behavior that can easily lead to the stress of worrying about job security. The only

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\*The mechanisms of biopower extend into mechanistically enforced rules around all aspects of embodiment in schools, including but not limited to rules about food, (when, where and how food and drink are consumed is strictly regulated as a health and hygiene concern); sport (rules about endurance, signification in sexually enticing cheerleaders, patriarchal ideas about boys playing through pain), regulation of bathroom use, sexual education/abstinence education, rules about walking and movement in general, rules about the embodiment of obscenity etc.

option for these teachers is to begin their questioning in the safe space of (radically) listening to their own inner stories.

For me, listening to my teaching body included the painful acceptance of my complicity in enforcing biopower. I began to see how I was trained to not notice that I needed to be dehydrated in order to urinate only after teaching three classes in a row. I started to understand how my policing of student eating/drinking and bathroom use necessitated my refusing to acknowledge or pay attention to my own basic physical needs. Similarly in order to police my student's gestures and dress, I began to notice how much I bought into ideas about my own 'appropriate' dress and body language (including ideas that now appear to me to not only be seeped in class bias, but to also verge dangerously close to old Madonna/whore dichotomies). As I started to hear my body in the school and to pay attention to those of my students, I began to find a new vantage point from which to understand teaching as embodied praxis. I was able to engage in a more critical ontology (e.g., Kincheloe, 2003; Kress, 2011) to begin to make conscious and deliberately subversive decisions about how to be a body in a school, as well as how to and enact with other similarly and differently positioned bodies in other institutional spaces.

## **BACKSTAGE 6: WORKSHOPPING STAGE DIRECTIONS**

I believe that it is pedagogically important to create spaces to be able to listen to the stories of our bodies and those of others. In this work I have sought to illustrate in how embodied radical listening can allow us to knit together being and teaching, feeling and hearing, personal stories and political texts. I now offer a list of affordances of radical embodied listening.

I. Radical listening to ourselves might:

- Engage us in hermeneutic phenomenology, as we clear the space in our own minds to listen to the past, (re)interpret it, and experience it with new insights.
- Allow us to speak the unspeakable in a safe space, working through understandings of the connection between emotions, physicality, and intellect.

- Encourage us to embrace the multiplicity of our own voices, and to hear inner contradictions.
- Foster a broader understanding of our roles in the workings of biopower in institutional spaces.
- Help us connect the personal to the political, as we step back and view our experiences as defined and contained by institutional structures.
- Disrupt the boundaries between self and other.

## II Radical listening as pedagogical praxis might:

- Counter the pedagogies of banking education (Freire, 1970) and death education (Kress, 2011).
- Involve silencing students.
- Frame intersubjective understandings and mimesis as important tools in social justice teaching.
- Shed light on how teaching and learning can be more complex, multilogical and interconnected.
- Engage teachers and students in deeper understandings of vulnerability/humanity.
- Make evident connections between the saliency of emotions and the production of values (Tobin, 2015).
- Encourage us to take feelings and bodies seriously in educational spaces.

## EPILOGUE

I have argued that critical educators might wish to consider foregrounding corporeal knowledge in classrooms and that this simultaneously involves crafting spaces for radical listening. As I exit this stage I remind myself to trust in the body's uncertainties, and in our collective ability to listen to them. Kincheloe and Tobin (2015) who argue that when we listen attentively we are not alone.

I hope they are right.

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