Sen05298

Assume the position: reconfiguring the spatial in the pre-service education classroom.

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education classroom.**

Current understandings of the practice of education locate pedagogy in the public domain
through the articulation of the personal domain (Pinar, 2004). Critical literacy has
provided teachers and teacher educators with a means of transforming subjectivity and
relocating the personal through writing (Kamler, 2001). The emphasis in a critical
literacy approach on the spoken and written word sits comfortably in the academic
discourse of tertiary education, although its engagement with the personal meets with
some resistance. However, to engage the personal through arts based approaches meets
far greater resistance. When used as the medium for core educational studies it provokes
passionate responses of both dissent and accord. The authors argue the possibilities for
an arts based pedagogy in pre-service education which provides a space for learning
outside the accepted academic discourse and which supports the possibilities of
imagining and knowing the positioned teacher.   This research (dis)locates (Laclau, 1990;
Edwards and Usher, 1997) the spatial configuration of the tertiary education classroom:
reconfiguring the physical, positional, and epistemological.

Assume the position

*The most significant moment in my study of curriculum and assessment was the
day when Mary and Kim came into the classroom and with hardly a word,
proceeded to work on drawings and whatnot without giving the class any
directions. Some students looked lost, some seemed agitated whilst other others
waited very patiently for the lecturers to say something. This incident summed it
all up for me. You do your own learning! True learning comes from within
yourself and not what other people tell you .(Max)*

Teacher and the class -assume normal positions?
Mary, Mary quite conversational where do your tables go?
Well structured classroom?
The discomfort of finding a starting place, where do I begin? Will this work?
(anonymous – co-authored writing)

*I chose to join the art installation group because I was hoping to receive the
answer to my long running question: how do you assess art? I began the Dip Ed
course under the illusion that I would learn how to be a teacher. ….in this
particular class I have come to understand my own position on curriculum and
assessment… it began with the realization that nobody, especially not the
workshop leaders, were going to directly answer my question, nor were they
going to teach me how to be a teacher… my list of questions has only grown.
(Elisha)*

In a pre-service education classroom, seventy-five students and two teacher educators engage in teaching and learning about curriculum and assessment. At the same time we, the teacher educators, are researchers concerned with the possibilities of arts based pedagogy in tertiary environments. Our research data are electronic images, photographs, tapestries, poems, email messages, photographs, co-authored writings.

As researchers we position ourselves within the theoretical frame of 'post', which involves 'opening as *transgression* or *breaching* the boundaries that mark and protect the territories of the elite or expert knowledge' (Stronarch and MacLure 1997, p.6). As teachers we engage the arts as a vehicle for 'the dance of ebb and flow of participation' (Abbs, 2003, p.61) in our sense making and that of our students.

The voices of Dewey (1934), Barone and Eisner (*in press*) are heard in this arts based approach to teaching and researching. Eisner (2002) cautions the arts based researcher to pay attention to form and content – we struggle against the constraints of the AARE formatting. This arts based research is understood, constructed and represented by a plethora of art pieces- sand mandalas, digital images, old school desks reinvented, and curriculum garments largely beyond the margins of these pages. We are constrained to a format of text, font, layout, margins and word limits.

They also advise researchers to illuminate (Barone and Eisner *in press*) - we shine lights on dark corners of the room and in turn we are illuminated by the work done in previously hidden spaces; 'to act and to judge in the absence of rule, to rely on feel, to pay attention to nuance, to act and to appraise the consequence of one's choices and to revise and then to make other choices - to find a rightness of fit' (p 16) - we have made teaching and research decisions within the 'rules' of this negotiated art based space. We have sought a 'rightness of fit' that responds to the shapes of the students and the constraints of the medium. We have sought out the nuances of movement and speech, of paint and sand. We have glimpsed all of this, the reconfiguring of space, position and understanding, from our 'angle of repose' (Richardson, 1997, 2003) as teachers and researchers.

Our research, like the teaching which is its concern, is (dis)located (Dixon, 2004; Usher 2002; Edwards and Usher 1997; Laclau 1990). In (dis)location the fixed is not replaced, but rather spatial and temporal locating is multiple and continuous. It is here and not there and there and not here (Usher 2002). In the (dis)located classroom the teacher is located as the teacher and as the student, at the front of the room and on the workshop floor, as having known and now knowing anew.

As teacher educators we are accustomed to the academic discourse of the tertiary classroom. We are skilful workshop leaders able to engage students in powerful discussions about pedagogy and curriculum. We have directed the conversations, challenged the students, and even listened to their questions. We are familiar with our role in front of five hundred students delivering our curriculum through engaging and well-researched lectures. Passionate about moving into engaging the imagined curriculum, a learning of exploited surprise, we stepped off the podium.

Arts based pedagogy

We have been drawn to the use of arts in our academic classrooms. Oreck (2004) who carried out a mixed methods study of over 400 K-12 teachers argued that the increase in the use of arts in teacher education classrooms 'is not to transform academic classroom teachers into arts specialists. Rather the general aims are to increase teachers' understanding of and efficacy in using the arts as part of an expanded repertoire of teaching techniques and to promote active, creative teaching and learning (p 55). We would add that what occurs is that students learn about teaching and curriculum through the arts; that the artistry of teaching in learnt through the artistry of performance.

Learning in an arts based curriculum allows the possibility of a performance, which, like rehearsal, is 'twice behaved' (Schechner 1988). The artist teacher is involved in the learning work of performance twice over – in the rehearsal or design and construction stage and also in the performance stage. In this way the performance is constructive as well as representative and communicative of understanding. **'**Rehearsals are not only a preparation for the opening [night], they are for the actor a terrain of discoveries, about him [her] self, his [her] possibilities, his [her] chances to transcend his[her] limits' (Grotowski in Richards 1995 p.118). The performance of arts based teaching is intentional – it aims to be transformative or effective (Beeman, 1986).

We wanted to teach core curriculum and assessment theory through active negotiated arts based approaches, to teach in the way we were teaching about. We also wanted to research how this process of learning through the arts occurs in the preservice classroom.

We gave up the podium. We no longer assumed the position. We moved back the tables.

In the first workshop we invited the students to begin the learning of curriculum theory by constructing art about curriculum theory. We walked amongst the students listening, talking, and bringing out materials and theorists. We were not greatly (dis)located. In the second three-hour workshop we entered the room as co-researchers and co-learners. We each began our own artwork in the large open space in the middle of the room. We gave no instructions. We gave no warning. We continued our work for an hour. The others were silenced, disconcerted, murmuring, waiting…

Arts based research

Our methodology is understood through it positional location. This research is informed by the period of the 'post'. Atkinson (2003) argues that some of the characteristic features of postmodernism include:

- resistance towards certainty and resolution;
- rejection of fixed notions of reality, knowledge, or method;
- acceptance of complexity, lack of clarity, and multiplicity;

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- acknowledgement of subjectivity, contradiction and irony;
- irreverence for traditions of philosophy or morality;
- deliberate intent to unsettle assumptions and presuppositions;
- refusal to accept boundaries or hierarchies in ways of thinking;
- disruption of binaries which define things as either/or (p 36).

Our research is also understood through its epistemological location. In the arts based educational research (ABER) tradition of Barone, (2000, 2001); Eisner (1985, 1991, 1995) and Barone and Eisner (*in press*), its purposes are to enhance perspectives through an artistic activity and to use aesthetic qualities or design elements. Traditionally, the use of an arts based approach in educational research has tended to use literary devices as in the poetic research work of Sullivan (2001) or the performance script of McCall (1993, 2003). More recent work involves visual arts, as in the portraits of teachers by Intrator (2003).

Barone and Eisner (*in press*) argue that the 'reader' of ABER requires an empathetic understanding of its inhabitants. The question for the reader or assessor is not about the mimetic features of the performance but whether it illuminates or raises profound questions that otherwise would not have been raised. They suggest that in assessing ABER, educational criticism is closely associated with the fields of art criticism and educational connoisseurship. Connoisseurship, they contend, is developed when an individual has refined their understandings and perceptions so that the meanings they are able to secure are both complex and subtle.

(Dis)locating academic discourse

Decisions we, the teachers, made:
- to team teach;
- to use an arts based approach;
- to use a constructivist model;
- to work one- to-one with our students, and alongside them; and
- to establish a reading/library area within the classroom for referral.

Week 1- wow! Creating an artwork to represent curriculum and assessment?!?! When Mary dropped this on us I thought to myself, 'How do I know!" Isn't that what they are meant to be teaching us here at uni? What is curriculum? (Sarah)

I am almost ashamed to admit my shortcomings in writing due to my belief that everyone else out there, all the other student-teachers, have their theories sorted out and ready to use, and I am the only vague and confused individual with limited wisdom to offer…I have become incessantly jittery on the inside My initial nervousness and unease about our class structure took some effort to dismantle before I could truly let myself go during our classes and during the exhibition which was the grand accomplishment to culminate this. Some reminders of my earlier

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*sensations of unrest came back to the surface on that memorable day of the
Exhibition when some observers commented:*
　　"Shouldn't you be studying?"
　　"What are you achieving by just being here?"
　　"Take out a pen and write something, your not learning." (Isabel)

*Since taking part in the classes, listening to lectures and reading the curriculum and
assessment book, the thing that has most stimulated my thinking is observing other
students art projects develop and listening to their ideas. (Helen)*

*I often wondered that to an onlooker, our class must have looked like a mess (this is
where the fugue thing came in – before I learned the art of music analysis, fugues
were awful, messy pieces of music that were always hard to learn). And I pondered
(out loud), that our class was in fact extremely organized. Eavesdropping on some of
the other groups, it may have seemed excessively orgainised… We (the students) were
the complexity in the chaos. (Rebecca)*

Teacher educators find themselves working within a contempory socio-political
discourse increasingly restrained by literalism (Doll 2000) and simplicity – 'One answer!
One explanation! One cause!' (McKay 2005). Initially coming to workshops looking for
quick and easy answers to questions concerning learning to be a teacher, the task at first
is to find the formula to "my Grade 4 teacher" or "my year 12 English teacher".
Resistance is the first response to the challenging, always confronting task of articulating
the public positioning of teaching through the personal (Pinar 2004). The students
recognized that we are alongside them within the uncertainty of the white water where
the understanding and knowledge is not always, and may never be, clear. In seeking
meaning from outside themselves the opportunity to imagine and create meaning within
is often neglected, forgotten and lost.

Reconfiguring the spatial

Decisions we, the teachers, made:

- our classroom was in the corridors, the downstairs coffee shop, the storeroom,
  outside, the computer lab, and Federation square; and
- timing for breaks and the workshops was fluid.

Usher (2002) argues a postmodern view of location in which there is equal importance of
space and time referents. Laclau (1990) used the term '(dis)location' to characterize a
contemporary society with a plurality of centres, 'engendering a condition of
decentredness where no fixed, essential identities can be produced' (Edwards & Usher,
1997, p 255). For Edwards & Usher (1997) (dis)location is a preferable term, 'where the
bracket signifies that location and dislocation are simultaneous moments always found
together, a positioning with simultaneously one and many positions (1997, p 255).

> The dynamics of (dis)locating both refuses a privileging of particular locations and voices and accepts the inherent power / knowledge dynamics of all pedagogic situations. (Edwards & Usher, 1997, p 255).

Within a postmodern sensibility the spatial binaries which have dominated in a spatially stable modernist perspective are called into question – home and homeless, insider and outsider, familiar and unfamiliar, location and dislocation, local and distant, local and global. Usher uses the locality of cyberspace to examine constructions of identity from positions of being neither 'here' nor 'there' yet also of being 'here' and there' (Usher, 2002, p 50). In a similar way this paper engages the ways in which students are (dis)located spatially, positionally and epistemologically through an art based approach to teaching and learning.

> *I am sitting outside following our art installation class determined to begin a written dialogue. I have conducted an internal dialogue almost from the time it was suggested in class….the art class has challenged many of my ideas regarding how to create a productive classroom environment. While I was beginning to understand the limitations of a traditional classroom structure, it has only been through seeing a real alternative that I have begun to really challenge some of my basic beliefs about both teaching and learning…..Since the class is set up with a broad amount of "space" for the student to move around in, I have been able to work at my own pace on my petticoat installation, while contributing and exchanging ideas with another group. I feel that much of my learning is achieved through these ongoing discussions which have traversed a wide range of subjects…(Jen)*

> *This art installation is a reflection of my journey through curriculum and assessment this semester. It is the product of a student who has had the opportunity to learn ……I was unsure for many weeks what was expected of me in this subject. I did not have any real direction and felt as though the people around me were privy to something that I was not as they seemed to have a focus and to know where they were going in the subject… then I went to the ERC and read Freire…. This curriculum has set my mind free. (Simon)*

> *When I look at the students in this subject that are not familiar to the fine arts and the complex nature of its face in the world, I am encouraged by their openness or willingness to do something unknown, perhaps we do live in an ever increasing pluralistic environment and the age of dichotomy is being washed away by a slow but stronger, wiser wave. (Jesse)*

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Reconfiguring the positional

Decisions we, the teachers, made:

- we were not positioned as holding the knowledge; and
- we were not positioned as holding the power of what occurred within classroom.

Positioning Theory is an explanatory scheme to understand and study discourse (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991, 1999; Harré & Slocum, 2003). Within the conversation we position others, and ourselves sometimes intentionally and often unintentionally. In relation to selves and conversations, positioning is defined as:

> …the discursive construction of personal stories that make a person's actions intelligible and relatively determinate as social acts and within which the members of the conversation have specific locations (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991, p.395).

Positions can and do change. For Harre (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991, 1999) one of the products of such discursive actions is the self. The students in the class repositioned themselves as teachers/artists/students and they could imagine themselves repositioned as curriculum builders:

> *Personally, I would like to continue my studies one day of building a model of curriculum around the Integral theory. This 'post post-modern' idea is only just starting to make ripples in the pond but it won't be long before those ripples become waves. (Dave)*

In the classroom responsibility for learning became a common concern, for us as teacher educators, and in turn our students. For students it was moments when they felt a sense of control or power to act in their own interests. We found that 'waves' were not generated without displacement. That responsibility could not be taken without it being given.

> *Our artwork took many hours of careful work to create and only a matter of minutes to sweep away. There was a sense of disappointment at this time, a longing to hold onto what we had invested our energy and time in …..This gave us insight into the thoughts of curriculum designers and those who control the curriculum, but it was a powerful reminder that we can not hold onto that which is destined to change. In order for curriculum ideas to grow and improve, it is imperative that we not hold onto our current notions too tightly. (Laura)*

> *One major difference with many of my other classes though this style of classroom structure has really made me feel in control and responsible for my learning. Consequently, I have spent a lot more time deliberating over ideas and seeking out information than in other classes. Perhaps most importantly though, I find myself looking forward to the classes rather than possibly begrudging the time being spent there. (Jen)*

Reconfiguring the epistemological

Decisions we, the teachers, made:

- to use a constructivist model; and
- to establish a reading/library area within the classroom for referral.

We started from the premise that assuming 'the' position in the classroom may limit the possibilities for imagining and layering of understandings that converge in the teacher education classroom. The reconfiguring of the spatial and positional permitted a 'dialogical performance':

> The aim of dialogical performance is to bring self and other together so that they can question, debate, and challenge one another. It is the kind of performance that resists conclusions….dialogical performance does not end with empathy. …More than a definite position, the dialogical stance is situated in the space between competing ideologies (Conquergood 2003, p 408).

In our data we heard Freire talking: I must be clear that I need to reknow what I think I know (Freire and Shor 1987, p 180).

> *Thankfully I am not responsible for assessing this task – though perhaps I should be? This task represents my whole reason for selecting this specialist group – it highly challenges my preconceived notions and understandings of teaching, curriculum and assessment. How can something as fun, as arty-farty or seemingly innocuous as a lentil mandala or as ethereal as a non-permanent sand mandala be a piece of assessable work outside the confines of an art studio? How will *lecturer 1 and *lecturer 2 allocate marks to these things? Has the process of creating this "thing", and involved us as a group, avoided an assessment task?...How do you fairly assess such a diverse group of students and projects while at the same time providing high quality and individual feedback on group activities? I might also ask, "is the variation among the art works any different in "real terms" from the variation among a series of 70 written 2000 word assignments?" Can an assessment rubric be applied to written work any more easily than to different works of art? What this activity has taught me is to be aware of different ways of determining understanding; it has released me from the well-know teaching fact that students have only learned something when they can recite it parrot fashion onto an exam booklet! Phooey! (Sara)*

> *…how can we justify the positions and actions that we make in order to assess our student's work? How do we judge what is right or wrong when it comes to cultural expression, interpretation or assigning a mark to someone else's creativity? If you know….please…. enlighten the rest of us….(Kate)*

Conclusion

Teaching as artistry, like aesthetic learning or arts based education has a greater potential for learning than traditional education if and when the artistic practice of teaching is conceptualized as a language that is a way of knowing and is part of a living culture of artistry (Rosen, 1980; Hentig, 1997). Mindful of the dialogical performance (Conquergood 2003), we have been confounded by describing this work within the traditional positioning of academic discourse: is this action research? Or is it research at all? We are (dis)located as researchers and teachers; caught in the current discourse of research led teaching and teaching led research. We assert that this work is between research and teaching and we make this assertion by positioning our research against the criteria for ABER:

> Does the work enhance meanings and deepen the conversation?
> Does it have an illuminating effect; does it give the reader the opportunity to notice?
> Is it referentially adequate; do we notice what is claimed to be there?
> Is it generative; does it promote new questions?
> Is it incisive; does it focus tightly on educational issues?
> Is it generalizable; does it make new connections? (Barone and Eisner *in press*)

We have found that arts based pedagogy in pre-service education provided a celebrated space for learning outside the accepted academic discourse. It was an occasion for discomfort, discord, (dis)location and re-imagining.

> *In the very first class I heard the work 'mandala'. I overheard it being discussed in groups….yet I didn't know what a mandala was…The process of creating was far more important than the end product. The almost hypnotic state we entered when focused on such a meaningful task is exactly what we desire for our students..(Lauren)*

On the day of the art exhibition students from other curriculum and assessment workshops were invited to attend, and one student noticed and noted the following in his own written task:

> *I saw a beautiful euphuism for the learning process in the art exhibition, one of the groups spent hours producing the most incredibly detail sand sculpture and then once finished just swept it away, with nothing left to show for their hours of hard work and dedication. Well, not nothing - they had what they had learnt; they had the process in their minds…(Ben)*

> *These beautiful delicate designs that I was shown were part of a journey for this artist. She had her own meanings behind those she had created. I decided to create my own, my own mandala, my own journey out of myself. It would be*

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*representational of my journey of discovery through this class and how my views
of can grow within that. (Lauren continued)*

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