

International Colloquium

Becoming aware in the teaching situation: body, gesture and speech

Université Paris-Est Créteil, France

May, 25-26, 2016

Paper submission guidelines

Professional teacher gestures are part of a system so complex that it is interesting to consider them from an enactive perspective according to which meaning emerges in situ. In other words, the teacher is constantly faced with the unexpected, unpredictability and must adjust his gestures and speech. This adjustment mobilizes embodied tacit knowledge, sometimes perceived as intuitive, which should be subjected to formal inquiry and documented. The body is not only a medium of communication. Through its gestures, postures and attitudes, the body literally embodies a way of existing in a professional context. Its different modes of expression, intended or not, conscious or not, are always dialogical. Radically cultural, vector of meaning, emotions, beliefs and values, gesture can convey dimensions of the self that make up our identities and co-construct our relationships with others. Gesture also connects students and what they learn, thereby facilitating the construction of knowledge, in the same way as it helps establish and maintain the rules of conduct in the classroom. Body language and verbal language are tightly woven together, forming an often inseparable unit of being. The layers of meaning intertwine, overlap, and complement one another. The quality of congruence is what is perceived most by students.

But meaning is never straightforward, neither for the producer of signs nor for those who receive them. A space of meaning is co-constructed in the classroom. Developing in a closed and codified place, relationships are also affected by proxemic dimensions: how space is used, increasing or decreasing distances at the risk of encroaching on another's privacy, managing eye movement and eye contact.

These extremely important elements (body, distance, voice) operate at levels of micro-perceptibility and often go unnoticed, as much for the person who emits the gesture as for the person who receives it. Enmeshed in routines of meaning, they are part of the phenomenological unconscious. Yet they have a strong influence and constitute the heart of the message.

The fact that gestures are brought forth in the ongoing moment of the relationship incites us to inquire into the concept of emergence. On the one hand, gesture is so instantaneous that it can feel as though our body somehow gets away from us. This part of gesture that escapes from us emerges in everyday life and as part of one's professional conduct, leading us to lose control not only of our actions but also our emotions. The unconscious, involuntary body that spontaneously communicates its activity is "legible" to others without our being aware of the effects produced. On the other hand, such instantaneity raises the question of appropriacy or how to embody "right" choices. Teachers constantly face unfamiliar, dynamic situations

which make up the complexity of their job. How is one to evaluate this “rightness” in the midst of action? To what extent are one’s means of expression steeped in culturally constructed codes and patterns? And to what extent do they emerge from the situation and create new meaning? How do teachers integrate these implicit skills that are important in establishing pedagogical relationships with their students? How do they become aware of their own functioning as they teach or during sessions of practice analysis? How can they share this knowledge with their peers? How is this awareness training undertaken in countries other than France?

Workshops

The purpose of this colloquium is to examine the embodied and implicit dimensions of teaching practice as they emerge in the classroom.

Discussion topics will focus on the following themes:

-Methodological issues: How are we to inquire into these emerging dimensions of practice? How shall we document and verbalize them? How can we access such micro-levels of functioning and the tacit knowledge that are the hallmarks of experience and professionalism?

-The question of meaning: Distance, engaging the body in space, directing one’s gaze, facial expression, quality of touch, voice inflection, dress, posture: these nonverbal dimensions are always dialogical. They are the outer manifestations of embodied values. However, as “dialogical signs” their meaning is not necessarily shared. How are we to document and elucidate these semiotic connections in order to establish a class contract? How can we gain access to meaning and values that elude ourselves and others? How shall we make such access explicit and share it within a group? What is the impact of the cultural context on understanding? How are teachers trained and educated in different cultural contexts?

-The issue of awareness and reflexivity at the moment of emergent gesture. What approaches foster awareness of one’s gestures? What roles do the encounter and the return of others play in this access to meaning? What tools promote reflective awareness of one’s actions? Are language and verbalization required to become aware of gesture? Is it possible to be reflectively aware at the very moment when gesture emerges? How do teacher trainers and educators foster such forms of awareness? What are the differences across cultural contexts?

-Managing stress and emotions: How do teachers undergo, channel or use emotion, affect, and involuntary gesture as ways of experiencing our living body in the lived body of the classroom? How do they create an ecological climate, non-threatening and conducive to learning? How do they promote active listening in its various dimensions?

-The question of how verbal and non-verbal language relate to each other: How do verbal and non-verbal language interact in the classroom? Under what emerging conditions do they replace or overlap one another? How do teachers evaluate and decide on the spur of the

moment if adopting one or the other is appropriate for students? Is verbalization necessary to become aware of one's gestures?

Detailed requirements

Proposals for papers to be presented orally should comprise:

-A title;

-An abstract including (i) a summary (not to exceed 1,000 characters, spaces included), followed by (ii) a short text (not to exceed 7,500 characters, spaces and bibliography included, with a maximum of 5 references). Proposals for papers should be submitted via colloqueprisedeconscience@gmail.com in word format.