June 2005

Book Review: Liora Bresler (Ed.). (2004). Knowing bodies, moving minds: Towards embodied teaching and learning.

Margaret A. Macintyre Latta
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Margaret.Macintyre.Latta@ubc.ca

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Liora Bresler (Ed.). (2004). *Knowing bodies, moving minds: Towards embodied teaching and learning.*

Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Reviewed by **Margaret Macintyre Latta**

University of Nebraska-Lincoln[1]

I spent the summer by the sea. It is always a re-turning experience; a re-turning experience that orients me away from the busyness of academic life and responsibilities, toward greater awareness of self in the world. Spending much time as a child and youth by the sea, my re-turn surfaces emotional. spiritual, sensual memories, as I let the experience of the sea wash over and around me. The suddenness of such elemental responsivity foregrounds my embodied understandings of self and other. Gadamer (1992) talks of foregrounding as the specifically situated and historically conditioned nature of all understanding. "Whatever is being foregrounded must be foregrounded from something else, which in turn, must be foregrounded from it" (p. 305). It is this sense of foregrounding that the sea elicits within me. Crowther (1993) finds fitting words: "It turns out that our perceptual engagement with the world discloses a deeper truth. Human being is the sensible world returned to itself" (p.112). Through my re-turn I once again find the significances of embodied understandings as fundamental to what it means to be human.

As the sea washed over and around me, so too did my reading of Liora Bresler's (2004) edited book. "Knowing Bodies, Moving Minds: Towards Embodied Teaching and Learning." I read as Gadamer (1992) suggests, shaping and re-shaping my reading experience, lingering within the text, amid my re-turn to the sea. Each chapter foregrounds embodied significances for learners and learning. Contributing authors draw me into the text in different ways and with different purposes, but all with strong recursive waves rooted in themes of receptivity and relatedness.

As I find myself experiencing these waves some are quiet reminders, some carry me away to new thinking, new ideas, and new experiences; some resonate deeply, while others awaken and enliven. Embodied understandings are elicited as I encounter myself within these waves. It is this self-encounter that makes the book so powerful. Gadamer's notion of foregrounding comes into play as concomitantly I engage the text and the text engages me. The ensuing mediation foregrounds encounters inhering in the sensible, creating a text that embodies the notion of embodiment as it enfleshes embodiment through the relationships of parts to whole to parts; the parts all linked, intended to be understood as a related whole.

A self wholly involved as creator and participator, bringing thinking, feeling, seeing, and acting into a vital relationship, permeates the goals of the book. In 1968 Merleau-Ponty introduced the notion of "flesh" to convey such interplay: the seer caught up in what he or she sees. Merleau-Ponty sought out this notion as a medium to circumvent the persistent problems of mind-body dualisms dominating the history of Western philosophy. And it is Merleau-Ponty's notion of flesh that emerges

[1] Published in *Visual Arts Research* 31:2 (2005), pp. 94-97.

for me as medium cohering the thinking of all contributing authors, exploring, expressing, enfleshing the body as part of our subjectivity and the basis for our being in the world. Flesh is understood by Merleau-Ponty not as a totalizing entity but as genesis, pregnant with possibilities. In this way neither subject nor otherness are bound entities; rather, they intermingle. Within this intermingling the body subject finds "anew the tissue that lines them, sustains them, nourishes them, and which for its part is not a thing but a possibility, a latency and a flesh of things" (pp. 132-133).

I find the genesis integral to "flesh" alive in Section 1 of Bresler's book, enticing me into the movement as each author seeks out theoretical, practical, and methodological directions foregrounding the body's role in teaching and learning. Embodied ways of being are discovered living within the movement. In the writing of Michael Peters, "Education and the Philosophy of the Body: Bodies of Knowledge and Knowledges of the Body", the genesis of flesh is disclosed through the works of postwar French philosophers committed to the "enfleshed subject, sensuous reason, and the embodied and engendered subject—a subject, not timelessly cast as an abstract universalism, but one that emphasizes the everyday activity contingencies of the becoming self" (p.15). The historical tracings rediscover the body as a critique of mind over body (and related dualisms) and offer potential for a new philosophy of the body healing such dualisms.

The self as always becoming, always in the making, is further addressed by Wayne Bowman in chapter 2, "Cognition and the Body: Perspectives from Music Education", as he roots the distinctiveness of music in experience and agency and thus as an

exemplar of the minded body. "Knowing in any humanly meaningful sense is emergent from and grounded in bodily experience and continuous with the cultural production of meaning" (p.48). Richard Shusterman in chapter 3, "Somaesthetics and Education: Exploring the Terrain", looks to somaesthetics as a means of sharpening such bodily awareness and greater consciousness in our actions. He sees this somatic dimension to all our thinking, feeling, and behavior limited to exploration in a few disciplines such as dance and physical education rather than taken up as a way of life. a way of living and being. Pirkko Markula in chapter 4, "Embodied Movement Knowledge in Fitness and Exercise Education", warns that bodily knowledge in itself is not embodied, but insists that fitness and exercise can foster a more holistic self-understanding and engage others in embodied practices. Both Shusterman and Markula see the body as integral to communication.

In chapter 5, "The Changing Body in Southern Africa—A Perspective from Ethnomusicology". Minette Mans documents the communicative capacities of the human body in dance in Southern Africa revealing how the purposes of dance have undergone fundamental change. Unfortunately, the changes undermine and underrate the body as a means of learning and knowing. Along with Shusterman and Markula, Mans locates the body as "an important source of knowledge of ourselves and others, and a means by which we are known"(p.90). Daniel J. Walsh in chapter 6, "Frog Boy and the American Monkey: The Body in Japanese Early Schooling", argues a case for the importance of building physical selves in early schooling as developmentally contributing to children in profound ways. To conclude this section Joseph Tobin in chapter 7, 'The Disappearance of

the Body in Early Childhood Education", is in agreement with Walsh but documents how increasingly disembodied teaching/learning practices have become normative practices in early childhood education. He identifies the culprit as the dominant discourses insisting on "order, policing, discipline, and surveillance" (p. 124) as impoverishing the lives of children and teachers.

This theme of impoverished learners and learning contexts arising out of disembodied curricula is present in each piece in Section 2 of the book. providing concrete examples of the potential of the body in teaching and learning. The arts are portrayed as exemplars of embodied knowledge but in each case the caveat of how easily this can be undermined is articulated. Liora Bresler in chapter 8, "Dancing the Curriculum: Exploring the Body and Movement in Elementary Schools", confronts and identifies the values inherent within school dance and Susan W. Stinson in chapter 9, "My Body/Myself: Lessons from Dance Education", relays lessons from dance education that focus on educating the lived body "as appropriate terrain for not just dance education, but all of arts education" (p. 165). Janice Ross in chapter 10, "The Instructable Body: Student Bodies from Classrooms to Prisons", evidences the learning through the body for teens in a setting allowing them "to discover. test, and then embrace fundamental somatic truths" (p. 178). She suggests that somatic truths ought not to be neglected in any learning context. Kimberly Powell in chapter 11, "The Apprenticeship of Embodied Knowledge in a Taiko Drumming Ensemble", connects the importance of bodily relationship, spirit, and feeling between the learner and learning with implications for all learning. Judith Davidson in chapter 12, "Embodied Knowledge: Possibilities and Constraints in Arts Education and Curriculum", deliberately takes up the disembodied curricular fear alluded to by all authors in section II, concluding that the arts indeed have the potential to "enlarge our understanding through the interaction of the body-mind", but that this is an all too rare and misunderstood experience. Finally, in chapter 13, "Exercise: Identity Collage", Charles R. Garoian challenges this rarity and misunderstanding as I am returned to a concrete exercise immersing me in the reflexive significances of learning about self through collage making.

As I conclude reading, I am reminded that ongoing reflexivity was integral to the genesis of my entire reading journey through the book. It is reflexivity that is at the heart of flesh collapsing the dualisms of mind-body meeting otherness, as Grosz (1994) explains, in its own "self-embrace" (p. 103). She states, "It is that the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeality; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication" (p.135). Merleau-Ponty (1962) refers to this as a fundamental reversibility experienced through one's body, the "fabric, into which all objects are woven, [which] is, at least in relation to the perceived word, the general instrument of my comprehension" (p.235). I am struck by how this turning back to self occurs via attending to the other; through the continual improvising of relations between self and other. My understandings of embodiment have indeed been enfleshed.

I return to Bresler's (2004) prelude to the book that refers to embodiment as a *Grande Idee;* a term borrowed from Langer. Bresler does put forth embodiment as a compelling way to rethink how children learn, teachers teach, and schools are or-

ganized. As a grande idee, she sees that within embodiment's very nature, it holds radical implications for what counts as knowledge, learning, and teaching. Alma Gottlieb, in the forward of the book talks of this integral nature within embodiment as a "falling into trust"(p. 1). The book throughout assumes embodiment to be elemental to human beings and positions the reader to fall into trusting the body as the medium for sense making. In so doing, the book enfleshes embodiment, experienced first hand through sensations, its life taking form in the readers' expanding and deepening understandings. I find tremendous hope in the turn to embodied knowledge as a grande idee, promising to newly address many of the current dilemmas associated with accounting for teaching, learning, and knowledge. The premise, that the fact of our embodiment ought to be the starting point for such accounts, asks all of us to see fundamentally what is at stake in teaching and learning through encountering ourselves and our relations to others/otherness. Akin to Bresler, I also find embodiment compelling, but I fear we are dangerously close to losing sight of this premise in accounting for teaching and learning. Bresler's book helps me to articulate this fear and to insist that "moving minds" demands embodied teaching and learning. And it seems to me that with the arts identified by contributing authors as constituting and giving expression to embodied encounters between subject and world, it is arts educators that can and must offer insights and direction. Undergirding this book is an imperative for arts educators, calling on them not to mask these significances for learners and learning but to re-turn to the inherent power of arts-making experiences as simultaneously articulating and revealing thinking, feeling, seeing, and

acting. Within the making experience, attention is called to process: how one is being creative and created. It is this attention to "moving minds" that arts educators ought to have intimate experience with and must return to their students. Arts educators need to take up the imperative of "Knowing Bodies, Moving Minds, Towards Embodied Teaching and Learning", positioning each other to be curriculum leaders, providing exemplars for all forms of learning. Enfleshing embodiment positions us to dare look at the sense and selves being made. Is this not a long overdue re-turn to the flesh of learning?

Author's Note

Margaret Macintyre Latta is an Assistant Professor in the College of Education and Human Sciences at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Currently, she teaches curriculum classes oriented toward aesthetic considerations emphasizing neglected epistemological assumptions in cross-disciplinary teaching and learning. Her research interests include teacher education reform and transformation through the arts. Recent publications include: "The Role and Place of Fear in What it Means to Teach and to Learn", *Teaching Education,* 2005, 16(3); "The Flight from Experience to Representation: Seeing Relational Complexity in Teacher Education" (co-authored with J.C. Field), *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 2005.21; "Curriculum As Medium For Sense Making" in G. Diaz & M. McKenna (Ed's.) *Teaching For Aesthetic Experience,* New York Peter Lang. 2004; "Confronting a Forgetfulness and Deformation of Teaching/Learning Methodology," *Teachers & Teaching: Theory and Practice,* 2004, 10(3); "The Call to Play" (co-authored with K. Hosteller) *International Journal of Education & the Arts,* 2003, Vol. 4; "The Possi-

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