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Artistry in Teaching: A Choreographic Approach to Studying the Performative Dimensions of Teaching

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Abstract

In this study, the role of the teacher as a choreographer of the educational experience is explored in relation to how they make the curriculum come alive in the performative space of the classroom. Using an arts-based approach, I applied concepts and tools from the study of dance to analyse the embodied dimension of teaching. I examine how two university professors vary the pacing, energy, and focus of the class to communicate concepts and ideas to the students, as well interweave multiple streams of information through their embodied communication and the narrative structure of the class.

2.1 Introduction

In Anne Bogart's (2007) book *And Then You Act: Making Art in An Unpredictable World* she writes, 'The translation of page to stage is the translation of the logic of ideas and words into the logic of time and space' (p. 12). The elements of time and space are inherent to the performing arts. They are the canvas directors, choreographers, filmmakers, and performance artists create upon. Teaching is a performing art in the sense that it is both temporal and spatial. The classroom is the stage, and the teacher performs or enacts their curriculum in front of a student audience. Some may stand at the podium reading from lecture notes, others move around, gesture to power points,

call on students, but all must translate the goals, objectives, and lessons on the syllabus into the performative realm of time and space.

In this chapter, I explore the embodied and performative approaches of two university teachers, and how they orchestrate the curriculum in the classroom. I take an arts-based approach that applies tools and techniques used in the study of dance to analyse the movements and sequential structure of a lecture style classroom. This study is focused on what Eisner (2002) terms the ‘curriculum in vivo,’ or the actual activities employed in the classroom and the translation of the ‘intended curriculum or the curriculum in vitro’ into an embodied and sequential narrative that brings the curriculum to life. Using a choreographic framework, I illuminate the aesthetic and embodied dimensions of teaching.

2.2 Artistry in Teaching

As Rubin (1985) points out, ‘The research on pedagogy describes the competencies and characteristics of skilful teachers. It tells us *what* should be done, but not *how* it should be done. ... The research on artistry ... tells us a bit more about the *how*’ (p. 91, italics original). The ‘*how*’ or qualitative and embodied dimension of teaching can be difficult to describe because of the ephemeral nature and the challenges of finding language that can encapsulate the complexity of experience. Polanyi (1966) characterizes this as the tacit dimension—what we know but cannot say (p. 4). However performing artists, particularly in theatre and dance, develop tools for studying the tacit through extensive training that cultivates sensitivity to how one’s tone of voice, posture, and bodily stature imbue a narrative with meaning. For instance, the way a dancer circles the shoulder could be read as a coy gesture to tease the audience, or a shrug of indifference.

Expert teachers also use the tacit and performative in the classroom. Eisner (2002) writes, ‘Judgment depends on feel, and feel depends on a kind of somatic knowledge. ... The body is engaged, the source of information is visceral, the sensitivities are employed to secure experience that makes it possible to render a judgment and act upon it’ (p. 201). He points to the way artists attune to the relationships between parts, and they do so not through a strictly analytic engagement of ideas, but also with the visceral and somatic. Actors, dancers, and musicians actively cultivate an embodied awareness to make judgments on how to react to qualitative stimulus with great sensitivity. One of the characteristics of artistic teachers is their ability to react to and improvise on their class plans in order to meet the needs

of the students—whether that be changing the agenda for the day because students are not understanding fundamental concepts needed to move forward, or choosing to stand motionless at the front of the classroom in order to quiet students rather than shouting to get their attention.

Performers and teachers share the broader goal of communicating to an audience, but also must help students and viewers connect to material. Sarason (1999) is concerned that education,

... glosses over the nature and complexity of the phenomenology of performing: How and why it requires a teacher to think, feel, intuit and flexibly adapt to students' individuality, and to do all of this for the purpose of engendering understanding and as a sense of growth. When we say that performers seek both to instruct and *move* an audience, we mean that the teacher as performing artist has in some positive way altered the students' conception of the relationship between sense of self and the significance of the subject matter, i.e., an increase in competence. (p. 48, italics original)

Sarason points to the lack of emphasis in education on the relational and performative nature of teaching and makes an important point about the necessity for teachers to *move* their students towards greater understanding—move indicating making the material personally relate to the student audience. Sarason makes vivid teachers need to think about how to present material in a way that engages students in self-growth and discovery, rather than merely covering concepts in the syllabus.

One of the major critiques of focusing on the performance of teaching in education is that it runs the risk of becoming 'edutainment,' or information presented in an entertaining way that lacks true substance. Pineau (1994) fears 'the claim that teaching is performance will evoke nothing beyond the facile acknowledgement that a certain theatricality can help hold the attention of drowsy undergraduates in early morning or late afternoon classes' (p. 5). She suggests one of the reasons the field of education has been critical of an artistic or performance approach to education is that it has largely been based on comparing the role of a teacher to an actor. She describes the actor-cantered approach as 'Performance is reduced to style, and further, to a particular style of enthusiastic theatricality employed to energize one's communicative behaviours' (p. 6).

Pineau's critique is apt given some of the literature that aims to develop the performance styles of teachers is laden with prescriptive advice about how to use humour, dramatic readings, and role-playing to boost enthusiasm in

the classroom. Tauber and Mester's (2007) book *Acting Lessons for Teachers* identifies enthusiasm as the most important quality for teachers to express and gives a variety of examples on how a teacher might spice up their classroom performance. This type of discussion fails to recognize the wide variety of teaching styles that may not emphasize enthusiasm but be quite successful at engaging students. If taken at face value, books of this sort can simplify the role of performance in teaching to that of a cheerleader, rather than acknowledging the complex nature of both good performance and teaching. It accentuates the exterior veneer of performance, without a discussion of the context, audience interaction, and development of self that rigorous performance training entails.

Louis Rubin (1985) in his book *Artistry and Teaching* looks specifically at what artistic teachers do. He provides many descriptions and criteria for artistic teachers such as, flair, originality, craftsmanship, discerning judgment, and extraordinary perception, but boils it down to 'artistry implies human accomplishment that is unusual in its proficiency and cleverness, and greatly superior to conventional practice' (Rubin, 1985, p. 16). Rubin acknowledges there is not one approach to artful and effective teaching. Although the skills common to effective teachers has been explored and articulated in the literature, not all teachers exemplify all of the characteristics on the list. He writes,

Teachers do specific things to accomplish their goals. It is not acting, per se, nor salesmanship, nor communication, nor entertainment, nor pedagogical jugglery which account for performance. It is the gestalt of these—moulded into a personal style, built around individual attributes, and energized by genuine commitment and an educated mind—which account for teaching that takes students beyond the confines of their interests. (Rubin, 1985, p. 163)

My impetus for studying college educators is to examine the gestalt nature of artistry in teaching and how various layers of communication assemble to imbue the classroom with meaning. As the authors discussed above, performance is an often-overlooked aspect of teaching and poses distinct challenges to study because of its affective nature. In this study, my aim was to explore how tools and techniques used to study movement and choreography in dance could be used to analyse the embodied dimension of teaching and articulate this often underexplored or articulated aspect of teaching.

2.3 Choreography as a Framework for Exploring Teaching

This study focuses on the *how* of teaching—primarily how each teacher enacted the curriculum in the classroom. In other words, I wasn't so interested in the *what*, or the content of the class, but was more invested in looking at how teachers structured the curriculum and imbued it with meaning through their performance. Eisner (2002) reiterates the relationship between course content and how it taught when he writes,

How one teaches something is constituent with what is taught. Method or approach infuses and modifies the content that is being provided. Thus, teaching becomes a part of curricular process, and curricular processes, including their content, become part of teaching; you can't teach nothing to someone. (p. 150, italics original)

Although the disciplinary culture and content of each course plays a role in teaching, I have focused on the temporal structure of the course—how a teacher organizes activities within the time allotted for their class—rather than the actual content of the course. In other words, what Boogart (2007) calls the *translation* of the curriculum into the live performance space of the classroom.

Having spent my early career as a professional dancer and choreographer, I drew extensively on that experience as I moved into teaching in lecture style classrooms. I found designing curriculum and orchestrating it in the classroom had many similarities to creating dances. In this study, I was interested in looking at classroom teaching through the lens of choreography to illuminate the relationship between embodied communication and the structure of the class.

Using a choreographic framework to look at teaching highlighted three key insights into the artistry of teaching. First, teachers and choreographers both create structures from scratch. Unlike in theatre where a director typically begins with a script, a choreographer, like a teacher, designs the overarching themes and narratives of the class. Second, choreographers oversee the entire aesthetic of a performance. Although many think a choreographer's primarily role is creating movement sequences, they also select sound/music, lighting, costumes, etc. that support their artistic vision and create the ambience for the dance to flourish within. Similarly, teachers create a wide variety of content for a course—assignments, exams, lectures, etc.—yet *how* they deliver that content and orchestrate learning in the classroom

contributes to creating an environment for learning. Third, a choreographic framework accentuates the role of the body in teaching. The basic elements of choreography are space (the area in which the body moves), time (the speed or pace of how the body moves), and energy (the quality of the movement). The moving body is a central component of choreography and using it as a framework for looking at teaching provided a language to articulate and analyze the role that movement plays in the classroom.

A choreographic framework allowed me to explore the structure of class—how each teacher orchestrated the unfolding of time and the narrative structure of the class—in relation to their embodied performance of the material. This helped me distinguish good performance from the curriculum. To use an analogy from theatre, it enabled me to determine the difference between a good play mired with bad acting, and conversely, an underdeveloped plot saved by the excellence of sensitive actors.

The choreographic framework also had limitations. Focusing on the performative dimension of teaching did not generate findings on the quality of the content of the class, nor if the skilful performance of the teachers increased student learning. The findings from this study focus on articulating the often overlooked embodied dimensions of teaching to bring to the forefront what was tacitly being communicated through the teacher's performance.

2.3.1 Data Collection

Stake (1995) suggests 'The researcher should have a connoisseur's appetite for the best persons, places, and occasions. "Best" usually means those that best help us understand the case, whether typical or not' (p. 56). I observed several professors before selecting two participants, Julie and Alexandra.¹ This allowed me to identify three criteria to evaluate if a teacher was a potential candidate for the study. First, the teacher must have a dynamic range as a performer and use the body as part of their instruction. For instance, I observed two professors that gestured often, moved around the room and spoke loudly, but these had little relation to what they were actually communicating. Both professors attempted to engage students with an enthusiastic performance, yet it created a type of monotone that was loud and energetic but lacking variation.

¹The names of the professors selected for this study have been changed to provide anonymity.

Second, I needed to have a working understanding of the content covered in the class to see the relationship between the curriculum and how the body was used as a tool for communicating ideas and concepts. I observed a professor of microbiology who was a dynamic performer, but the advanced nature of the course and content made it difficult to understanding the major concepts covered in the class. Although I was not explicitly studying the content of the course, it was important that I could grasp the general concepts and follow the narrative structure of the course.

And third, it was important the teachers selected for the study had different teaching styles to add complexity and texture to the case. Julie and Alexandra had two distinctive styles of performing in their teaching. Alexandra is a professor of finance and has been teaching for over 20 years. She is the course coordinator for an upper level finance class that all undergraduate students must pass to graduate. She and her colleague co-authored the textbook for the class, and she regularly revises the course content and teaching strategies to meet the needs of the evolving student population.

Julie is a professor of public relations and has been teaching at the university for 9 years. I observed her teach an advanced public relations course. Most of the students in the class were advertising majors, and the course was not required for graduation but a popular elective. Julie teaches a variety of classes in her department and this was the second time she had taught advanced public relations.

I selected these two instructors because they provided a distinct contrast in teaching styles in the classroom, and each attuned me to different issues of how performance is used in the classroom. While there was little similarity between the courses, departments, and contexts of the classes studied, this study is not meant to compare and contrast particular ways of teaching a specified class, but instead to look at how teachers design, orchestrate, and use the body as a tool for communicating in teaching. In many ways, the different contexts for each class—the size, the students, and departmental contexts—added to the complexity and richness of the study, as well as highlighting different approaches to orchestrating the curriculum in the classroom.

I attended Alexandra's finance class and Julie's public relations class for the entire 15-week semester with the exception of exam days, and collected three kinds of data for this study: observational field notes, semi-structured interviews, and documents from the classes studied (syllabi, assignment prompts, etc.). In addition, I interviewed Julie and Alexandra three times each during the semester for approximately one hour, and conducted an additional interview of 1.5 hours at the end of the semester. All interviews

were audio recorded and transcribed. I also had numerous conversations before and after class with both teachers and documented these as closely as I could from memory in my field notes. The majority of my questions in interviews with Julie and Alexandra were based on specific observations from the class. By asking questions based on my observations, I was able to gain an understanding of the motives, philosophies, and rationales behind activities, policies, and the way they altered the structure or performance during the class.

2.3.2 Embodied Method

Observing the way each teacher used her body to communicate in the classroom was essential for this study. In a previous study of dancers in a choreography class, I began to devise a method for translating embodied observations into written language. I further developed this method into a 4-part process using tools and techniques from studying movement in dance to analyse the teachers embodied personas through a sensory approach. In phase one of the process, I studied the teachers movements through an embodied approach (dwelling and interiorization), and in phase two I worked to articulate embodied observations into language that could render embodied observations visible to a reader (transcription and translation).

Polanyi (1966) describes the process of learning embodied knowledge as moving from dwelling into interiorization. In the first phase, a student *dwells* with an expert observing and mimicking movements until it becomes natural in their own body, and they have *interiorized* it. The process Polanyi describes articulates how dancers study and learn movements. First they observe a teacher or choreographer do a sequence of movements. Next they begin to co-dwell observing and trying to do the movement in their own body. Through reflective repetitions of the movement sequence, a dancer will eventually get a sense the rhythm, pacing and weighted quality of the movements and interiorize the sequence into their own body. Homans (2010) uses a quote from ballerina Natalia Makarova to illustrate this process of interiorization. Markarova described the process of interiorization as, ‘dancers are trained . . . to “eat” dances—to ingest them and make them part of who they are.’ (Homans, 2010, p. xix)

Studying the movement of Alexandra and Julie provided a distinct challenge; I could not co-dwell with the teachers in the classroom as I would in a dance class. Instead, I would take notes trying to capture the details of the gestures and movements I observed. Then I would go home and recreate

these movements and gestures as closely as possible in my own body. This process of dwelling was iterative and with each new observation, I refined the details of my embodied performance. However, I found to interiorize the quality of the movement—the rhythm, weighted quality, and energetic dynamic—I needed to *watch with body*. This meant not taking notes, quieting the analytic mind, and letting my body absorb the affective qualities of each teacher's movement. I would very subtly allow my body to move and respond to the teacher's movements and later would conjure the felt sensations when reconstructing movements, gestures and postures observed in class. I was not able to fully interiorize the quality of each teacher's movements without periods of engaging my kinaesthetic awareness and knowledge.

In phase two, I began to articulate my embodied observations into words that attempted to capture what I had observed. In the first phase, I wrote detailed transcriptions of common gestures breaking down each movement and describing it in words. Although these were helpful in meticulously analysing the movement, they were tedious to write and even more tedious to read. The fourth phase of the process was translating these transcriptions into language that captured the affective dimension and what it communicated in the classroom. Rather than trying to transcribe what I was observing, I attempted to write descriptions that encapsulated the feeling, tone, and overall affect of the movement within the context of the situation, and often this led me to use poetic imagery and metaphor to help the reader visualize what I had observed.

The 4-part process of translating embodied observations into written language was time-consuming, but it gave me a unique insight into the experiential dimension of embodiment that I have not found through any other method. The point of translating embodied observations into written language is not to say that I understand the participant's reasons for moving or can know their feelings by doing the movement in a similar way (Stinson, 2004), but rather, they allow for a rich description that is based on what the body was actually doing. For instance, instead of saying the teacher looked displeased before class started, by taking on the posture of the teacher, I can describe the action. Instead, I might say the teacher pushed her weight into the podium, leaning forward, as her eyes intensely scanned notes before class.

It is also important to note that neither Alexandra nor Julie was purposely using movements and gestures in the class. In fact, I would show them common gestures in interviews and ask them to comment on their perceptions of what they might be communicating. They often would reply, 'I do that?'

Their gestures and movements were fully integrated into their teaching persona; hence my job was to bring the embodied into the foreground in order to examine the tacit nature of embodiment in teaching.

2.4 A Day in the Life of the Classroom

The concept of teaching style relates to what Eisner (1979) identifies as the implicit curriculum or what is conveyed through the activities, structure, tone of voice, disposition, and the emphasis a teacher puts on certain aspects of class. In the following section, I will highlight vignettes from the first day of both Alexandra and Julie's class. First impressions are important in teaching. The first day provides valuable information on what the course will be about, but also the general attitude and disposition of the teacher. If one thinks of the first day like a movie trailer—a short synopsis to give a potential audience member an idea of what the film is about—both teachers gave an accurate representation of the aesthetic of their teaching style on the first day of class. The structures of Julie and Alexandra's first day presentations were similar in form, but not in style or delivery. I will move back and forth between the two to accentuate the contrast.

2.4.1 Before the Class Begins

Alexandra sits casually leaning back in a tall office chair watching a live stream of Bloomberg Television² on the computer monitor while the students see it on the projector screen. On the bottom half of the screen is a window with the international date and time counting up the hours, minutes, seconds, and right now it is 9:20:12 a.m. A handful of students, six or seven, are sitting near the front of the classroom at tables that seat two; some are watching the projection of Bloomberg, others are looking at their phones. Alexandra sits at the podium/technology cabinet on the right hand side of the room. She occasionally looks at her own phone, and smiles at a funny commercial. More students pour in until the class is almost full—about forty students distributed in five columns of tables that seat two. The room is relatively quiet; the students face forward bracing for what is to come. This finance course is notorious because it is difficult and students need to pass it before they can take other upper level courses.

²Bloomberg Television is an United States based international news station that delivers business and market news.

At 9:29:30 a.m. on the international time at date clock, Alexandra stands, takes off her jacket and places it on the back of the chair, and at precisely 9:30:00 a.m. she hits a button on the computer and the sounds of reporters squawking and ticker tapes running stops abruptly. The website for the class appears on the screen and class begins.

At 11:52 a.m. the lecture hall is full of chatter. Students stream in and greet people they know with smiles, waves and hellos. The seats are partially filled with clumps of three and four students sitting together taking up about half of the approximately 200 seats. The hall is long and narrow 12 seats across and 17 rows back. There are no windows and wood panelling lines the walls partway up. At 11:55 a.m. the door at the front of the lecture hall swings open and in walks Julie. She smiles, sets her stuff down on a table at the front of the room and scans the crowd. She gives little waves and says hellos to students she recognizes, and then sits on the table at the front of the auditorium and begins to swing her legs as she continues to scan the class. The room is full of chatter, but Julie catches the attention of the students in the first three rows when she asks if anyone went anywhere exciting over winter break. A student responds that she went to Mexico and Julie responds, 'I love Mexico, but my husband never wants to go because he says it is too dangerous.' She then leans forward to confide to a few students in the front row that she is 'rockin' the hat' because she burnt her hair with a straightening iron and will be wearing hats until she can get it fixed.

She looks at her watch at 12:00 p.m., and says, 'I'll give it a few more minutes,' meaning she will wait to start class, because students might be late on the first day. At 12:02 p.m. she says, 'Alrighty, let's get started' as she pushes herself off the desk and moves to the centre of the room.

2.4.2 During the Class

At 9:30 a.m., the projector screen that once had Bloomberg Television playing now displays the course calendar. Every class session is mapped out with titles like 'Financial Markets' and the accompanying Power Point can be clicked on to download. Deadlines for tests, group projects, and homework are noted on the schedule, and Alexandra carefully goes through each requirement: weekly homework, three midterms and a cumulative final, three group projects, and pop quizzes. The workload is daunting, and Alexandra tells the

students that this class is ‘Finance through a fire hose, because the fun just keeps on coming.’

After systematically going through the calendar and basic guidelines for the class, Alexandra switches modes, and begins a section of the lecture she calls ‘eccentricities.’ She explains that all teachers have expectations and pet peeves that are unique, and she wants to be up front about hers. First, she explains that she doesn’t accept late work and emphatically tells students that assignments need to be put in the mailbox on her office door, not in the general mailbox in the business building where ‘anyone has access to it.’ Second, she doesn’t negotiate grades; they get what they earned. Alexandra then continues and gives them strategies for doing well in class. She suggests that students read the chapter before coming to class, and do the practice questions at the back of the book after class. Alexandra makes the distinction between ‘knowing’ something and being able to ‘demonstrate’ that you can do it, and suggests studying is not reading the book, but applying that knowledge through doing practice questions.

She ends her discussion on eccentricities by saying, ‘Class starts at 9:30. If you are late, please come in through the back door, so you don’t disturb your fellow classmates.’ She also says, ‘if want to do something else, like surf the web or text on your phones, go someplace else to do it’ because ‘it hurts my feelings when you are not paying attention to me.’ She says this with an exaggerated frown mocking sadness. She ends by saying, ‘In finance, the fun never stops, so let’s get started,’ and she begins a lecture on strategies for investing that takes up the final 45 minutes of class.

After getting off of the table, Julie takes centre stage at the front of the auditorium and begins the class by asking, ‘How many of you have had a public relations course before,’ and many students raise their hand. She asks a few more questions about what courses they have taken and then says, ‘Okay, what do you guys want to know?’ She pauses for a second while looking out at the sea of students, and with a sly smile says, ‘No, I will tell you’ indicating that she will go over the guidelines for the class.

But she doesn’t tell them just yet; she continues to ask them questions—what kinds of jobs do people in public relations do, and the definition of key terms, like what is a ‘public’ and the difference between a ‘strategy’ and a ‘goal.’ She is quick to call on students as hands go up and leans on the first row of theatre seats in the direction of the person talking.

She then asks again, ‘Okay so what else do you want to know?’ She pauses, looks upwards, and nods her head as if checking off things she needs to discuss. Then, she tells the students there will be two group projects—one based on building a P.R. campaign for clients she has recruited, and the second is a case study presentation. She advises students to email her if they want to be in specific groups, and she will assign the rest of the students randomly.

Julie says, ‘Okay, what else’ and pulls out a piece of paper from her folder, scans it quickly, and announces, ‘Most of this stuff is on the class site,’ but does not use the projector to show the students the class website. She then explains that if the weather is really bad, she might not be able to make it into town because she lives in the country, but that rarely happens, but to check their email before class on bad weather days.

She asks students if there is anything they really want to cover. No one responds at first, and then a student says she wants to learn about the different agencies they could potentially work for, and Julie says she would be happy to Skype in alums and have them discuss their first jobs. She tells them she is ‘happy to bring people in and do what interests them as long as we can fit it into the schedule.’

She reiterates that everything they need—syllabus, group assignment prompts, etc.—are on the website, and they can look at it later. She then switches modes and says, ‘So here are some things you should know about me. I start out liking all of you. Some people say I have “pets” but really the only thing you have to do is come up and talk to me, and I will like you.’ She summarizes, ‘basically, don’t harsh my mellow.’ Julie reiterates that she likes all of her students, but says, ‘If I catch you cheating, I will bust you’ and her tone lowers and one eyebrow goes up as she looks out. Again she states, ‘Really guys, don’t harsh my mellow, and we will be fine.’ Julie ends by telling the students that ‘you would have to be a total loser to fail this class,’ and that if they come to class and do the work, they will do well.

2.4.3 Summary

First impressions are just that—impressions. The first class is an important window into what is to follow, but certainly over the course of 15 weeks things can and do change. Yet, a student in Alexandra’s class would likely surmise that timeliness is important, and the due dates are fixed; she is no nonsense, the class will move at a quick pace, and each class will cover a substantial amount of material. Julie seems to be approachable, easy going,

and interested in getting to know the students and engaging them in conversations before and during class. The first class was focused on finding out what the students already knew about public relations and putting them at ease about the class—the information is online, and if the students try, they should have no problem passing the class.

2.5 The Choreography and the Dance: Curriculum Embodied

In this section, I will discuss the choreography of the classroom, or how each teacher approached sequencing and structuring the activities in the class. Drawing on observations over the entire semester and interviews with both participants, I develop two frameworks to describe Alexandra and Julie's approach to planning classes. Next, I will discuss the embodied dimension of teaching and how each teacher's physical performance adds an additional layer of meaning in the classroom.

2.5.1 Scripting an Experience

I would characterize Alexandra's approach to teaching as a scriptwriter because of the time she invests and the emphasis she puts on structure in the course. When observing Alexandra teach, you have the feeling that nothing was left to chance. Each lecture feels like a calculated performance that includes stories, detailed Power Point slide presentations, and mathematical problems worked out in class to see if students understand the concepts. I had the opportunity to observe a few lectures twice (once in the Fall semester during the pilot study, and then again in the Spring), and although there was some variation, the lectures included the same stories to exemplify a concept. Watching Alexandra teach was akin to seeing an experienced actress play a role she has done many times, but yet, still finds ways to make it feel fresh each time.

Alexandra often begins class with a story or metaphor. For instance, when discussing portfolio diversification she asked, 'Why is it bad to put all of my eggs in one basket.' She mimed having a basket resting on her forearm and directing students to look into the imaginary basket to visualize the idea of having a basket full of things as she walked up one of the isles. She used this metaphor as the basis for the rest of the lesson on diversifying investments. Later in the semester, during the NCAA college basketball tournament, she asked students to bet on which team would win. She engaged the students

in thinking through how someone could trust that if they put \$100 on a team, they would get their money. She went on to describe the role of a bookie in betting, and then related this to the futures market and the way a clearinghouse functions in a similar way.

Alexandra comes from a long line of storytellers. Her grandfather was a newspaper editor in the Netherlands. During World War II, he was known for cleverly using the Dutch language to give the Nazi propaganda he was forced to publish a double meaning. Alexandra said that storytelling and writing is a part of her family lineage, and that it is common in her family to speak in parables. She described,

Whenever we want to get a point across, we always tell a parable. When you are talking to people you tell them straight, but you give them a story, so they understand where it fits. And we've always been [storytellers] in our household. It's true, when we are trying to get a point across, we give the parable because it is much easier to say, 'I get that because I see it,' rather than I understand the abstract nature of it.

Alexandra's classes have a theatrical quality, not only because of her energetic performance, but also because of the tight narrative. Alexandra doesn't meander through topics, and she doesn't mince words. Her lectures have the quality of a script that was carefully written, and then enacted with sensitivity to the audience's reaction. In a student interview, when I asked what characteristics he would use to describe Alexandra's teaching, he replied, 'She doesn't waste words.' It is clear from the years of teaching this course that her performance is well-rehearsed.

2.5.2 Creating Experiences on the Fly

Julie's style of teaching was more spontaneous and improvisational. I often wrote in my field notes, 'fly by the seat of the pants,' to describe her approach which, at times, was exhilarating. For instance, on the third day of class, she dedicated the entire session to leading a discussion on a burgeoning issue at the university. It was a subzero temperature day and many colleges in the surrounding area had cancelled class, but this particular university did not and sent out an email advising students to be cautious getting to classes. Students began a twitter hashtag to respond to this, and some sexist and racially disparaging tweets about the chancellor were included. This incident made national news. Julie spent the entire class leading a discussion on how

the university could deal with this from a public relations standpoint. A student in the class was featured in a *Huffington Post* article two days later giving his take on the issue through a tweet. Julie recognized this publically by projecting the article on the screen before class and applauded him when he entered the classroom.

Julie often began class with a public relations issue that was currently in the news. When she didn't have an example prepared, she would invite students to share issues related to public relations and on the spot pull up a video online related to the topic to watch and discuss. The success of these discussions varied greatly depending on the examples chosen and the student's interest and willingness to participate.

Julie did lecture and used detailed Power Point slides that were essentially outlines from chapters in the assigned textbook. Julie often illustrated concepts from the textbook with public relations cases that served as practical examples, or she would make up scenarios to illustrate these concepts. There was always a sense of spontaneity to Julie's lectures over the textbook material. While lecturing, she typically turned her back to the students to look up at the Power Point slide with her index finger on her chin—a stature of thinking. She would quietly read the text to herself under her breath and nod as she took the information in. By the time Julie turned around, she had thought of an example related to the concepts on the Power Point. For instance, one day she was talking about non-violent protests and said, 'An example of this would be like if the Girl Scouts had a sit-in at the rotunda of the state capital on a day they were going to talk about STEM education to make them [legislators] aware of the lack of women in science.' She stopped and smiled delighted with the thought, and said in a quieter voice, 'That would actually be pretty cool wouldn't it' as she directed her gaze to a few of the students sitting in the front of the class.

I asked Julie how she prepares for the course, and she said that she creates all of the Power Points before the semester begins. She said, 'Pretty much, the foundation is ready to go at the beginning of the semester, so that I can do fun things or refine it during the semester.' I then asked about her daily preparation, or how she thinks about making the material come alive in class. She replied,

Some of them [lectures] I have done enough times, I know what I am going to say. If there is a current event going on, I can draw that in. I have some examples on my slides, but I usually come up with those on the fly. Some days are better than others. Sometimes we

have these case studies [student presentations on a public relations case]. I mean, usually there is something that we are talking about in the material and I can bring in something in from that [case study presentations] into the discussion.

She conceded that she likes to be flexible with her class plan, and that this ‘drives some student’s crazy,’ but reiterated that this is the nature of public relations—things change quickly, and one must adapt.

2.5.3 Structure Embodied

In this section, I will explore the embodied dynamics of Alexandra and Julie’s teaching, and how these added another layer of communication to the classroom choreography. The above characterizations of Alexandra as a scripter and Julie as an improviser were visible in the ways they used their body’s to communicate the content of the class. For instance, Alexandra’s movements tended to accentuate what she was saying—her circling arm gesture signalled the forward movement needed to think through a problem, and when her arm outstretched to the power point screen it was to highlight a specific line of text or point on the graph not a general gesture in that direction. The precision of her scripted text was also mirrored in the specificity of her gestures.

Julie’s performance was less didactic and rhythmic than Alexandra’s. One movement flowed into the next as the words cascaded out of her mouth. She occasionally used specific gestures to accentuate what she is talking about—like drawing her hands together in front of the body to signal getting ‘focused’—but usually, the gestures were more an indicator of her own bodily attitude at the moment. For instance, sometimes she stood with wide legs in the centre of the classroom when she wanted to demand attention, or put a finger to her lips as she listened to a student and thought about what they are saying.

A helpful analogy to describe the aesthetic uniqueness of Julie and Alexandra is music because it encapsulates the tonal quality of the voice in coordination with the energetic qualities of the movement. In general, Julie’s performance was more melodic and Alexandra’s percussive.

Julie projected her voice without being loud. Her words came out with feathery edges that smooth one sound to the next, but each sound was clear and articulate. There was something calming about her voice. It was soft without being meek, steady but never booming. The rise and fall of the tone of her voice reverberated through the room.

Julie's postures were typically casual; she sat on the backs of chairs with her feet on the seat facing the students, leaned against the wall, and occasionally sat on the floor in the isles during student presentations. There was a shuffle to her walk as she meandered up one isle with her 'Mom' mug in hand. Julie attempted to simulate the feeling of an intimate conversation in a large lecture hall with her students. She was informal and invited conversation, just as she would in a one-on-one situation. The major difference was the sphere of her attention. Julie was able to expand it in a large classroom to embrace the entire room, and with ease, zero in on a student that was talking, and then widen it back out to the rest of the room. Her presence in the classroom was embracive.

In contrast, Alexandra's performance was dramatic, punctuated, and had a pronounced rhythm. She hurtled words out of her mouth making sure to hit every consonant—tongue against teeth. Rather than a streaming melody, Alexandra spoke in cadences that shifted from progressive rhythmic explorations, to sudden silence, and an occasional boom of the base drum. Her voice was full of tension, getting higher in pitch as she got louder—a shrill trill when she was excited or exasperated. She used her gestures to illustrate concepts like widening the hands away from one another to show the market is growing and bringing them together to show it is shrinking. Finance lends itself to didactic gestures—markets move: up and down, grow and shrink, crash—and Alexandra illustrated these movements with her body.

Alexandra made use of dramatic pacing in her speaking. She knew how to pause and dangle suspicion or explode into a faster pace. The body often reflected this pacing; at times, she stood in a pause position, held her hands behind her back talking through a concept, and then glided over to the podium with a finger dangling in the air right before letting it fall down dramatically to set the Power Point into motion. Her pacing was significant. The pauses signalled a space for students to process information before moving on, creating an ebb and flow of information with breaks in between. This was especially apparent to me as a non-finance/math person. Although I often did not understand the mathematical equations, nor could I do the problems assigned in class, I usually understood the concepts discussed.

Both Alexandra and Julie have great range—they could be explosive, quiet, measured, casual, but these took on different qualities in each teacher. Alexandra was animated, had stories to tell, and appeared to fully relish in divulging the information bit by bit; the class unfolded so students see the beauty of markets, numbers, and Excel documents. The finance class was her stage and the performance had been thoroughly structured and rehearsed, but there is never a feeling that she was merely 'going through the motions.'

Each performance was fresh and at 9:30 a.m. the curtain opened, and Alexandra was rip-roaring ready to go.

Julie was more like a talk-show host or the ringleader of the class. She was clearly the star of the show. She directed the conversations, posed questions, set up situations for discussion, but the class felt improvised—the content of what was being discussed was perhaps less important than keeping the discussion going. She attempted to draw students out by asking them questions like, ‘what do you think about this’ inviting them to personally respond and this often took the class away from conversations based in public relations and into other discussions related to the students’ beliefs and opinions. She spoke the students’ language regularly using slang words like chick, dude, lol, etc. Although Julie related to the students as peer in her speech and attitude, she was clearly the host of the ‘show’ in class responsible for calling on students and responding/redirecting the conversation.

Leder (1990) describes ‘the absent presence’ (p. 3) of the body in everyday life and many scholars on embodiment refer to the embodied dimension as the ‘background’ (Radman, 2012). I found that the embodied dimension of teaching similarly functions on a subterranean level. The structure of the class provided a narrative, yet the embodied performance of each teacher acted like a perfume that permeated the class. The percussive quality of Alexandra’s performance and tight narrative created an atmosphere where one needed to sit up and be ready to go. Students often arrived a few minutes before the class began to review notes and prepare for the lecture. The more melodic and casual quality of Julie’s performance created a relaxed environment and students sometimes would whisper quietly to one another during lectures.

Yeats (1989) poses the question in his poem *Among School Children*, ‘How can we know the dancer from the dance?’ The embodied dimension of teaching is intertwined with the choreographic structure of the class just as the dancer and the dance itself are difficult to distinguish. My interest in making a space to look at the choreography and embodied dimension of teaching individually has been to highlight the often overlooked tacit forms of communication that add layers of meaning that are difficult to discern and describe.

2.6 Conclusion

Dewey (1934) characterizes an aesthetic experience as leaving an audience with a feeling of ‘consummation rather than cessation’ (p. 37). In an aesthetic experience, there is a seamless flow of ideas that is continuous and all parts

of the experience are integral to unifying the whole. In regards to teaching, it is the difference between covering key concepts in order to check them off the list, to weaving the same concepts together to tell a broader story of their relevance.

Artistry in teaching is complex because there are many variables to contend with: the curriculum, the students, the classroom space, the time of day the class is offered, the teachers energy level, and sometimes even the weather makes a difference. Finding ways to use all of these elements in the classroom to engage students in learning is a form of choreography, and on the good days, everything seems to move towards consummation. Eisner (2002) points out the connection between the curriculum design and how the teacher in the classroom expresses it. He writes,

How one designs a lesson or curriculum unit matters, and the design of such plans and activates depends every bit as much on attention to relationships among their components. In the course of teaching matters of pacing, timing, tone, direction, the need for exemplification are components whose relationships need to be taken into account. The ability to do so constitutes a part of the artistry inherent in excellent teaching. (Eisner, 2002, p. 202)

Looking at the classroom as a work of art through a choreographic frame allowed me to see the variations between Julie and Alexandra's approach to structuring the course and how they communicated and implemented that plan in the class.

This study also reiterates Pineau's concern that an actor-centered approach to the performance of teaching is flawed. Artistry in teaching comes from an integrated approach that includes the design, implementation, and classroom performance of teachers. Rubin suggests that there is not one way to become an artistic teacher, but in this case study it is apparent that a thoughtful design and ability to synthesize concepts so the students see how the materials of the class coalesce is impetrative. An engaging performance is not enough, and it takes a thoughtful course design as well as finding ways to translate that plan into the time and space of the classroom.

Barone and Eisner offer 'arts based research is the effort to extend upon the limiting constraints of discursive communication in order to express meanings that would otherwise be ineffable' (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 1). In this study, I have developed an embodied method and framework based on approaches dancers use to study movement to illuminate the embodied dimension of teaching. My work is in response to writers like

O'Loughlin (2016) who registers concern that if the embodied or tacit dimension of learning is not addressed then we run the risk of instilling actions and reactions to others unconsciously. She writes,

These values and categories also encompass activities undertaken to form corporeal habits but end up being much more than corporeal habits. Since their entry into the individual is not by means of the presentation of ideas and concepts, but instead by means of direct bodily intervention, they in fact bypass consciousness, becoming ingrained as basic orientations towards the world. A cognitive paradigm unfortunately denies the body's active intentional capacities. (O'Loughlin, 2006, p. 69)

In my attempt to translate the ineffable tacit dimension of communication into a discursive language, my desire is provide a tools for analysis from the arts to better understand the complexities of the performative and embodied aspects of teaching.

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