Objective, hypothesis & research questions

This pilot project explores embodied learning in anthropology. The aim is to advance knowledge of bodies as agents and resources in academic knowledge-making. Embodied learning (1-3) is a well-established element of learning within aesthetic and craftmanship traditions (4-5), increasingly in primary and secondary education (6), and while not officially part of the curriculum, anthropologists of science have also long documented the importance of embodied learning for the success of graduate students in medicine, chemistry, biology, and geology (7-11). Similarly, within anthropology it is a well-established fact that the researcher's body and emotions play crucial parts in anthropological fieldwork and analysis (2, 12-16). But what is it that makes embodied learning so crucial, not least for academic knowledge practices, and how can we become more attentive to the potentials of these dimensions for knowledge making?

This study holds that:

- Intellectual creativity draws on underexplored kinesthetic and affective dexterities that can be recognized, trained and refined through alternative learning methodologies and in communities of practice

To explore this hypothesis, we employ three research questions:

- What are the features of embodied learning?
- What is brought into light if we explore bodies as agents and resources in academic knowledge-making?
- What kinds of creative potential for research can be released and nurtured by explicitly training kinesthetic and affective sensitivities and attention?

To respond to these questions, the study has a dual focus: academic knowledge practices and alternative embodied learning methodologies. More specifically, it explores current anthropological research and teaching practices and, experimentally, brings three alternative embodied learning methodologies into these: contact improvisation, storytelling, and bodily-emotion-attention training (17-24). Anthropology is an especially privileged site to examine embodied knowledge practices, due to the centrality of the researcher’s body and emotions in fieldwork and analysis (2,12-17,21). By exploring existing practices and examining the results of introducing the three embodied learning methodologies into teaching initiatives, the study shall advance knowledge of bodies as agents in anthropological knowledge-making.

The study brings together an international team of collaborators with experiences in embodied learning methodologies. The Interacting Minds Centre, AU hosts the project.

Impact & relevance

The study
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Appendix A: Synopsis of the project

- advances knowledge of the creative potentials of embodied learning in academic knowledge making practices
- develops innovative learning tools and practices
- fosters inter-disciplinary, -faculty and -university relevance by establishing relations with Dep. of Clinical Medicine, AU or SDU as well as the relevant teaching and learning units in these universities
- seeks to secure future interdisciplinary impact by applying for major grant for a larger interdisciplinary project

The larger project shall expand the pilot’s impact by 1) advancing the explorative research beyond disciplinary boundaries and 2) developing teaching practices for the involved disciplines.

**Research design**

Drawing upon the core research team members’ expertise in three alternative embodied learning environments, the study is designed to both explore features and effects of embodied learning within anthropological knowledge making practices, and to set up the foundations for the larger project.

To do so, seven main strategies are employed:

1) Literature review
2) Observation of anthropology teaching
3) Student focus groups and expert researcher interviews (25)
4) Establish relations with specified departments at AU and SDU
5) 2 research team workshops:
   a. extrapolating experiences from respective fields of expertise
   b. designing student workshops
6) Voluntary workshops for anthropology students,
   a. incl. fieldwork; participant observation, reflective student diaries & focus groups
7) End seminar for present & future collaborators

All leading to publications that advance knowledge of how embodied learning can unlock creative potentials in research practices, and to securing funding of the larger interdisciplinary project.

**Ethics and Practicalities**

Observation of existing teaching and interviews with students and teachers will be conducted according to established ethical guidelines, incl. informed consent (26). All experiments will involve only volunteers and take place outside formal teaching situations.
References

Appendix A: Synopsis of the project


18. Little & Dumit 2017: Articulating Presence: Attention as Tactile, with Nita Little (for book on Thinking Touch in Partnering and Contact Improvisation


