

AN APPROACH TO RESEARCH ON EMBODIMENT AND FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE

METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES TO INTERPRETATION

Paper to the symposium: *Mis-presentations and Re-presentations in a Time of Interpretation*

– Embodiment, Understanding and Text in Educational Research

ECER, Berlin, September 2011

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Abstract:

This paper deals with the researcher's role and the status of the data s/he is inclined to use. The outset is theories on embodied knowledge and knowledge forms such as those devised by Pierre Bourdieu, Hubert & Stuart Dreyfus and Jean Lave who all struggle to find out how to view embodiment from either a subjective or a cultural perspective without neglecting the other. Consequently, their respective theories fail to account for the ways in which the subjective perspectives and cultural contexts are necessarily interwoven – as Merleau-Ponty puts it – or ethical – as Aristotle would claim – or interdependent – as Højrup argues. Studying a teacher training program, specifically the relation between placement and teaching, this presentation argues for a 'meeting point' and theoretical frame of Merleau-Ponty, Aristotle and Højrup that dialectally grasps the relations between researcher and interviewee by understanding them as either bodily interwoven, a life-mode or virtuously related. The inclusion of subjective perspectives and cultural conditions enlightens educational research as a process of interpretation where the embodied and life-mode structured observation both opens and closes ways of interpretation. The conclusion is that being interwoven with the interviewee is a virtue in itself that increases as well as imposes certain limits on singular opportunities as the researcher and interviewee project meaning onto each other in terms of pre-reflective perceptions, life-mode ethnocentrism and appropriate knowledge forms.

INTRODUCTION

In this symposium on interpretation a central general question is this: “*In what ways is it possible to grasp something about learning experience in education through a phenomenological-hermeneutical approach?*” The problem raised poses two central questions about the methodology of interpretive research by addressing:

1. The researcher’s own role in collecting and interpreting data, and
2. The status of the data as presentations, representations and mediations that the researcher is inclined to use.

In this presentation I discuss how an approach to research on embodied knowledge and knowledge forms can deal with these two questions. I argue that Pierre Bourdieu (1990), Jean Lave (2002), and Hubert & Stuart Dreyfus (2002) all miss the dialectics of the embodied subject as interwoven with the cultural context. Consequently, their respective theories fail to account for how the subjective perspectives and cultural contexts are necessarily interwoven – as Merleau-Ponty puts it – or ethical – as Aristotle would claim – or interdependent – as Højrup argues.

From a phenomenological point of view, inspired by French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), a main point is that human bodies are interwoven and hence create and are created by each other in a pre-reflective manner. Following Merleau-Ponty (2000, 2002), this fundamental, yet ambiguous, relation seems to clarify how the researcher and interviewee are inter-bodily contextualized, but still perspectival. This means that the researcher and the interviewee are interdependent in ways neither of them has a total access to, but without losing their subjective, bodily perspective on experience. According to Bentz and Shapiro (1998: 42), the researcher “*should view the research process as a journey between ourselves and the text – that is, something to be interpreted and reinterpreted in the social process of research*” (Simons 2009: 82). But in order to do any interpretation transparent to other researchers how does the researcher ‘pull himself out’ of the ontology that grounds his methodology?

To answer this question I turn to the Danish structural ethnologist Thomas Højrup (2003) who argues that social orders and disorders can be analyzed in analytical terms of different life-modes having particular kinds of logos and practices. Looking at the research process from this viewpoint, not only the interviewee carries traits of a particular life-mode; so does the researcher. Among the researcher’s challenges while doing fieldwork, interpreting and discussing the status of the data seems to be an awareness of how the researcher’s own logos of life-mode affects the field work and analysis.

What is meant by logos becomes clearer if we turn to Aristotle (1999) and his theory on knowledge forms as personal and social virtues. Knowledge forms are often seen as either *theory* or *practice*, but Aristotle differentiated between six ways of knowing (Eikeland 2008) without specifying *what* to know, but rather what *forms* of knowing are more appropriate, relevant or virtuous in particular parts of human living. In the light of this symposium one question pushes through: *How does the researcher project imagines of “good practice” onto the interviewee or the context observed?*

These three different theories on human social life come together in what I call a “meeting point” of dialectical approaches to the individual and societal relation whereby no part is overstressed over the

other, nor any differences dissolved, but where the relation is approached as dynamical and interdependent. In order to describe the dialectics between individual and social sides of embodiment the meeting point as a theoretical framework transcends some well-grounded dichotomies between phenomenology and structuralism and between descriptive and normative approaches to research.

The progression of this paper

The challenge of interpretation, the researcher's role and status of data are exemplified by a sample from my fieldwork, which leads to a discussion of the interwovenness of the researcher and interviewee mutually projecting ethnocentric logos onto each other. After that, a short overview of theories on embodiment is presented leaving further research challenges of conducting dialectics between individual and cultural conditions. Hence an approach to embodiment and knowledge forms is sketched out followed by an analytical framework that, ending this paper, argues for interwovenness as researcher's virtue.

“IS ANYBODY GUILTY?” ON BEING BODILY INTERWOVEN WITH THE INTERVIEWEE

In research on embodied knowledge and knowledge forms a phenomenological methodology can radicalize the question of interpretation by re-asking the positivist question: *“Is anybody guilty of affecting the research process?”* The positivist sees the researcher on beforehand as guilty of having bias, prejudice or subjective interests, and the research design has everything to win in order to gain back some objectivism. The interviewees are viewed as authentic, innocent and impartial to the research and therefore have everything to lose. According to a positivist approach, the researcher has everything to win, and the interviewee has everything to lose. The point that I wish to make here is the contrary, i.e. that both researcher and interviewee have something to win and lose and are hence both guilty and innocent.

This point can be illustrated by an example from my field work (see also Gunn Engelsrud 2002). In the following citation, a teacher training student (hereafter the student) writes the following in an exams report on an internship after I had made video recordings of her while she was teaching in class:

Student C.: “Having the unique possibility to watch myself on video after a lesson, has been extremely educational, simply because knowing that you have to change your way of moving in the classroom is so much different from actually seeing it yourself. Therefore when I noticed how little I was moving and how attached I had become to the blackboard and the chalk; I became more focused on it and started to move around a bit more. This among other things resulted in me getting a better view of what the pupils were doing and therefore made it easier to spot the ones who were doing things they shouldn't be doing, along with starting to gain a little more confidence and adapting the role as the leader of the classroom even more.”

Following the positivistic ideal of conducting objectivistic research methodology one could ask, “Is anybody guilty polluting the research process?” The student did not seem to have calculated the pros and cons before signing up for being an interviewee in the fieldwork for four months, but her exams report certainly does seem to show signs of her intentionality or particular interest. In her placement I

videotaped her teaching for two weeks while I sat quiet in the back of the classroom. Afterwards I showed her some of these recordings and interviewed her while we watched it together. I intentionally tried to make the student feel comfortable before recording, but I soon realized that I could only do this and get a close picture of her own understanding by doing more to gain her trust. On her initiative, I agreed to give her some feedback on her teaching while we had informal talks, which also boosted the quality of my interpretations. All in all it seems that the student and I are both guilty as both of us had certain interests or in the fieldwork process. However, we are also innocent since the student simply made use of an opportunity to improve her practice, and I gave her feedback as a necessary part of the research methodology.

Since it is a juridical paradox to be both guilty and innocent of affecting the research process, I wish instead to draw upon the works of Merleau-Ponty (2000) and call the intentionality of researcher and interviewee "*interwoven*." In contrast to the Husserlian (1999) transcendental and subjectivistic term of intentionality Merleau-Ponty (2002) speaks of intentionality as a "*deeper intentionality*" (note 54. p. 140) displaying how the embodied subject pre-reflectively experiences the world around him or her. This understanding of intentionality connects to the bodily relation between the researcher and the interviewee as being interwoven which Merleau-Ponty views an existential matter described as an ontology of the flesh (Merleau-Ponty 2000): Since humans are corporeal, the embodied subject gains its visibility and existence only from being its self visible as flesh and thereby ambiguously interwoven in inter-corporeality with other humans, the social and material world. And so the researcher and the interviewee become what they are, partly because of their bodily perspective and partly because of the embodied relation that transgresses and conditions thoughts and reflections.

On the other hand, this methodological approach may make it difficult to lay out all the premises in the interpretative analysis process: Did the feedback make the student change her teaching? How can the researcher's interwoven relation be meaningful to readers of the research? To Merleau-Ponty (1964), the relation between researcher and interviewee can be illustrated by the immanence / transcendence paradox which goes something like this: Everything exists for me, and yet everything existed before me. Just like in language, a word can make sense to me without having been made by me. Merleau-Ponty draws the conclusion that it is exactly through humans' immanent, yet transcended, existence that meaning is created. In this sense, the pre-reflective body becomes a seat of interpretation (Gallagher 1992) as the interviewee and the researcher transgress each other from each their bodily perspective (Merleau-Ponty 2002) and become interwoven through their commonly developed way of understanding the relation during the time and space of the fieldwork. So yes, the feedback probably did change her teaching, her didactical reflections or other issues yet to be discovered, just as my own perceptions of her practice, her principles and goals were nuanced and enriched: The interwoven relation does make it difficult to lay out all the premises in the interpretive analysis as the researcher's role get's blurry as both guilty and innocent.

This ambiguous interdependence radicalizes the introductory problem of this symposium by rejecting any other way of looking at the researcher's guilt or innocence; the interpreting researcher is not only constructing fieldwork, design and data, but is also himself constructed by the field of his research. So, the problem of re-presentation is not a question of asking what is already given, which eventually could clarify who is guilty, but of analyzing how data is produced in the relationship between the researcher and the interviewee, and how they create each other in that process. The question is this: What does "being bodily interwoven in the fieldwork" mean for the ways in which the researcher

constructs the interviewee and how the interviewee reacts to that? To answer this, a short map of viewing embodiment is sketched out, discussing in short some of the trouble that theories on embodiment struggle with.

CHALLENGES OF EMBODIMENT AND KNOWLEDGE FORMS

Among the overall challenges for theories on embodied knowledge and knowledge forms, some of the difficulties are related to the immanence / transcendence paradox in terms of how embodied practice can be viewed as both personal and societal without overstressing one over the other. And how can one understand the relation and dialectics between them? Here follows a short discussion of Dreyfus & Dreyfus, Bourdieu and Jean Lave that, admittedly, does not give these full credits, but illustrates some of the overall challenges to embodiment theory.

In the taxonomy of the American scholars Hubert & Stuart Dreyfus' theory (2002, H. Dreyfus 2002), the learner's stepping from novice to master explains how the ability to understand and act in the relevant areas is a process of embodied learning of intuition. What seems to be missing in this theory on the expert's embodied intuition is the inclusion of the situated conditions that make the expert's choices valuable. One could say that this is exactly what Dreyfus & Dreyfus are up to, arguing for the expert's embodied intuition, but to the Danish professor in psychology Ole Dreier this does not exclude that the expert's intuitive choices just as well could be rather random or coincidental (Dreier 2002: 97).

Matters of institutional, societal or cultural proportions seem to be left out by Dreyfus & Dreyfus, but are key notions to the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1990) as he views practice in terms of the bodily habitus by which the learner carries certain amounts of social, symbolic or cultural capital that positions him or her in a learning environment. But habitus does not explain the intentionality of individuals or how or why they individually strive for certain goals. And so the term of habitus becomes rather deterministic in explaining the relation between the individuals and institutions (Throop & Murphy 2002). Further, Bourdieu does not see individuals as related to each other, but merely to social action or social institutions, which seems to hold practice not as participation but rather as adaptation (Lave 2002: 48).

In her theory on social learning, the American anthropologist Jean Lave (2002) explains the learner's movement from peripheral to central legitimate participation in a workplace as an embodied process of situated learning taking the whole life world of the learner into account. Nonetheless, Lave's theory seems to overlook not only the personal trajectories (Dreier 2002: 84) by overstressing the positive relations between the learner and workplace, but also participation as a possible de-individualizing socialization.

So; the works of Dreyfus & Dreyfus, Bourdieu and Lave approach embodiment very differently, i.e. either by suggesting embodiment to ground a fairly subjective intuition or by insisting that embodiment mainly functions as socialization, or by viewing the embodied workplace as a learning zone. It is praiseworthy how far these theories have taken the research on embodiment, but this short overview also shows how embodiment as a trinity of a personal, cultural and institutional matter is still difficult to enclose as they either overstress the conditions of individuality or sociality.

AN APPROACH TO EMBODIMENT AND KNOWLEDGE FORMS

As introduced, what seems to be needed is an approach to research on embodiment and knowledge forms that dialectically grasps the body and the Umwelt as interwoven (Merleau-Ponty 2002), ethically related (Aristotle) and culturally interdependent (Højrup 2002). Therefore, a “meeting point” between Aristotle, Højrup and Merleau-Ponty is formulated to set up a theoretical framework originally to analyze how the knowledge forms of a teacher training internship embodies the intended and practiced knowledge forms (Knudsen 2010). This “meeting point” consists of agreements on limited issues and is far from a total alignment – nor is it intended here to be so. In short, the differences between them amount to nothing less but this:

- Højrup claims that humans’ social practice must be analyzed in terms of structural life-modes, which is at odds with the Merleau-Pontian phenomenological analysis of subjectivity and intersubjectivity.
- Aristotle approaches knowledge forms normatively as virtues in contrast to Højrup who descriptively approaches conditions of human experience.
- Merleau-Ponty and Højrup view the life world or life-modes as everyday practice conditioning experience, whereas Aristotle claims that experience could lead to a priori knowledge of universals. (See Modrak 1991, Fóti 1998 for further discussions of “the nous-body problem of Aristotle”).

Still, this “meeting point” creates a theoretical framework that analyzes the role of the researcher and the status of the produced data by viewing the body as the seat of interpretation where the logos or lived meaning of life-modes (Højrup 2002) and knowledge forms (Aristotle 1946, 1999) are derived from both the subjective and social sides of the interpreting embodied subject. The notion of the embodied subject does not exclude either reflection or abstract thinking (Merleau-Ponty 1995), but characterizes how reflection is ambiguously subjective and socially conditioned by the virtues of knowledge forms to perform righteous acts and the cultural forms of interpellation that specific life-modes tend to face.

Thomas Højrup (2003) analyzes social change by studying relations between cultures of everyday life and social organization in institutions and states. Even though Højrup does not speak of embodiment, his structuralist cultural theory that describes the relations between life-modes (the lived practice in life worlds) and the social institutions is mainly developed out of studies of everyday practice, inspired by the ethics and politics of Aristotle (Højrup 2002, 2003).

“If the social structure as a whole presupposes fundamentally different forms of practice and ideology, it should be possible to construct concepts of several distinct life-modes ... which would entail distinct types of social institutions and social organization.” Thomas Højrup (2003: 15)

Højrup makes an analytical division between four ideal types of life-modes in modern Western societies:

- Career life-mode: abstract thinking, self-development
- Self-employed life-mode: holistic thinking, responsibilities
- Wage-earner life-mode: pragmatic thinking, rights and duties
- Person-oriented life-mode: ethical thinking, caring (Højrup 2003).

Each life-mode is characterized by different understandings of means and measures, causes and effects in order to explain the practice of meaningful lives in relations to other life-modes and social institutions. These relations are characterized by the life-mode struggle for acknowledgement, life-mode ethnocentrism and forms of interpellation processes between life-modes and social institutions.

Højrup perceives the structuralism of the life-modes as dialectical, and on these terms he can be said to relate to the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and his notion of how bodily subjects are interwoven in the immanence / transcendence paradox. Humans who carry traits of particular life-modes embody these life-modes in a pre-reflective, cultural practice.

In the theory of life-modes, humans perceive their lives as they “are” and not how they are valued and positioned as Bourdieu’s theory does in terms of “habitus” (Bourdieu 2003). Even though habitus is more or less developed out of the Merleau-Pontian term “the intentional arch” (Merleau-Ponty 2002, Bourdieu 2003), underlining its bodily character, a division of terms can be made between “habitus” and “hexis” to allow a better grasp of the intentionality that got lost in Bourdieu’s interpretation of Merleau-Ponty. Inspired by Aristotle, Ulla Holm (1993) describes habitus as a corporeal socializing intentionality *towards* a social environment, and hexis as a corporeal, intentional disposition designating the personal intentionality *from* a social environment – attributing a significant subjective element to the latter. While Højrup (2003) is not aware of this particular division of terms, an understanding of life-modes as hexis could probably improve the theory’s capability to explain the intentionality and logos of practice in the life-modes.

This becomes more evident looking at how Aristotle views hexis as incarnated disposition for virtue (Aristotle 1999, Nicomachean Ethics: 1103a16-26). According to the Swedish philosopher Olav Eikeland (2008), Aristotle speaks of six knowledge forms all consisting of different levels of knowledge and experience:

- Theoresis: Systematical abstract insight
- Poesis: Creating and producing
- Khresis: Instrumental use and handling of tools
- Pathos: Passivity and receptivity
- Praxis (in two modes):
 - Teoria: Practical insight
 - Phrónesis: Ethical and social responsibility (Eikeland 2006, 2008).

A knowledge form is not particular knowledge about a subject, but *forms* of knowing and thereby analytical categories to segregate different expressions of knowledge relevant in different areas in life. The knowledge forms are not absolute, but changeable over time and space, and they can conceptualize the appropriate logos at a given topos. Aristotle views knowledge forms as virtues, which means that a given acquired form of knowledge must face both the individual and social needs midway between excess and deficiency. This sort of “open ending” makes the theory analytically sensitive to cultural contexts and to some extent normative, but without saying what particular knowledge or action is preferable.

Højrup (2002) argues that each life-mode interpellates along with the state, i.e. social institutions, to make good citizens in a formation process of phrónesis with the ideal of a citizen that can both master and be mastered (see Aristotle 1946 for Højrup’s inspiration on this). This reading of Aristotle is

debated (Højrup 2002), but what the combination of state and life-mode analysis adds in order to make the dialectical position stronger in this line of thinking is that each life-mode will participate in this phrónetic formation process only on the terms of the particular life-mode, just as the phrónesis by Aristotle is defined as personal virtue (Aristotle 1999). Taking this understanding of a connection between life-modes and knowledge forms further, each life-mode will interpret each knowledge form in terms of the logos of their particular life-mode. Some life-modes will probably seem more relevant to some knowledge forms than others, but the point of this advancement is that life-modes not only develop particular practices, but also interpret all knowledge forms in distinct ways. These interpretations – or what Højrup might call interpellations – relate to the immanence / transcendence paradox that illustrates how humans are being bodily interwoven and meaning-conditioned.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK: RESEARCHER'S ROLE AND ANALYZING DATA

The fieldwork design was constructed to gather data on how knowledge forms are embodied during placement as they are intended and practiced by the student, their teachers and supervisors. The design consists of 40 interviewees from teacher education, child care, and nurse and engineer education who were interviewed and observed before, during and after placement. In addition, I conducted a fieldwork of four months, making observations and video recordings of two teacher training students during placement and the writing of their Bachelor's theses, interviews with the students, teachers and their supervisors, the students' own video diaries plus the students' assignments.

In the sample presented earlier, the student writes in her assignment about being an interviewee. It is a *"unique possibility"* that was *"extremely educational"* as she *"became more focused"* and gained *"more confidence and adapting the role as the leader of the classroom."* The student came to her conclusions after I had shown her the recordings and given her minor feedback.

The idea of showing the interviewee the recordings was to interview the student about her own experiences in the sample so that I would not overinterpret this later. Showing her the clip, I exposed the overall design to risks of interference, which also happened as the student explicitly changed her teaching. But her willingness to change her teaching is far less interesting than *how* she changed it, and so the interference is actually improving how to understand what she understands.

In my feedback I told her that it puzzled me why she would teach in such a disorganized manner, not really knowing what the pupils are learning. What happened is that I projected my own career life-mode logos and virtues of appropriate knowledge forms onto her: I constructed an image of her as 'a teacher who did not know how to teach' because she did not practice a teaching close to *teoria* as I would have done. But what I also experienced was that she expected me to give her my opinion. She did not change much in her teaching, but appreciated the feedback as she projected her person-oriented life-mode logos onto me by seeing me as an expert that did not evaluate her at an exam, and that she could consult and be safe with.

CONCLUSION: INTERWOVENNESS AS RESEARCHER'S VIRTUE

The problem raised in this symposium poses two central questions about the methodology of interpretive research by addressing the researcher's own role in collecting and interpreting data, and the status of the data as presentations, representations and mediations that the researcher is inclined to use.

I conclude that the interwoven relationship between researcher and interviewee can be said to be a virtue in itself (see also Peshkin 1988 or Simons 2009 for thoughts on subjectivity as the researcher's virtue). Projections are unavoidable and make the interwovenness as a researcher's virtue a midway between the excess (i.e. an overinterpretational force) and deficiency (i.e. an objectifying distance) that could either lead to subjectivist conclusions or obstruct the fieldwork and deeper analysis. The virtuous analytical practice of displaying prejudice may flash out the interviewee's culturally embedded logos of practice and gain the interviewee's trust that could lead to even more elaborated insights improving the status of data.

Further, when analyzing the data, basic conditions of the interviewee's relations with e.g. supervisors, teachers, colleagues, etc., are also revealed – relations that consist of the interviewee:

1. Being bodily perspectival and interwoven so that other humans, materials and social relations are pre-reflectively perceived, while meaning is created both immanently and transcendently.
2. Having traits of a life-mode that analytically illustrates how she is culturally embedded, ethnocentric and striving for acknowledgement as she interpellates with other life-modes of individuals and social institutions.
3. Being disposed for knowledge forms as virtues that are sensitive to contexts and analytically distinguish between appropriate knowledge and acts as a consequence of personal and societal expectations.

The three components of the relationships pose a heterogeneous analytical framework of parallel, yet related, studies of culturally embedded and embodied knowledge forms that make up an analytical framework to dialectically and systematically analyze how the personal, cultural and societal relations between individuals and social institutions are constituted, related and interdependent.

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