

UNDERSTANDING PHENOMENOLOGICAL INTER-RELATION BETWEEN TEACHER AND STUDENT THROUGH PLAY

*RAJENDER PARSHAD, \$SWADESH RANJAN SANBIGHNA #DR. PREM LATA JOSHI

*, \$Research Scholar, CMJ University, Shillong, Meghalya
#Principal, Women College of Education, Jhojhu Kalan, Bhiwani (Haryana)

ABSTRACT

The relationship between teacher and student has always been a central interest of the educational process. While the nature of this relationship can be understood from various theoretical frameworks, research that seeks to understand the “lived experience” of this relationship is less prevalent. This research explores the phenomenological nature of the teacher-student relationship in the context of teacher education. Stories of the lived experience of this relationship were hermeneutically interpreted against the philosophical writings of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Buber. A further essential understanding opens the play of relating. That is, the teacher and student experience their relationship as a play that is unscripted, uncertain, and lived beyond the rules of engagement. In this play, teachers who are attuned to relationship show a phronesis, or practical wisdom, as they relate moment by moment. The outcomes of this research call into question technicist and instrumental models of teacher education which are presently underpinned by the dominant neoliberal ideology. Consistent with critical and humanistic approaches to education, this research calls for the humanising of the educational experience through the educating and re-educating of teacher educators and teachers towards essential understandings of relationship.

INTRODUCTION

In the increasingly complex role of being a teacher in India, it is critically important that beginning teachers explore their own experiences of the teacher-student relationship such that a growing sensitivity and attunement to this pedagogic relationship develops. Pre-service teachers take their prior experiences of the teacher-student relationship into their initial teaching positions; they cannot do otherwise. These experiences are part of their personal history of “being-in” the teacher-student relationship. An implication here is that teachers invariably “teach out of who they are” (Palmer, 1997, p. 1), thus these prior experiences influence the beginning teacher’s “way-of-being” with future students (Palmer, 1998).

The context for this research is pre-service teacher education. This context is important for a number of reasons. The student teachers and lecturers who have participated in this study are engaged in educational programmes that focus on the preparation of beginning teachers. In addition, these student teachers and lecturers experience the teacher-student relationship every

day in teaching-learning experiences that might include the teacher-student relationship as content for inquiry, or in the context of practical teaching experiences where student teachers work with children. The beginning teacher's way-of-being in the teacher-student relationship has implications for their future relationships with children, the basis of this inquiry. The critical point here is that student teachers and lecturers are involved in teacher education courses that will, in turn, be influential in the subsequent stories of the teacher-student relationship for other people.

This research paper discusses how teachers and students experience being-in-the-play of relating. The initial focus of this chapter will be the play, and include the movement and experience of being in the play. In the second section, the chapter will focus on the phronesis of being-in the relational play. It should be noted that the organisation of this chapter is an arbitrary sequencing of the stories around the ideas of play and phronesis. This should not suggest that these ideas are experienced separately; rather, experiences of the play show the presence or absence of phronesis.

RELATED STUDY

Being-in relationship is being engaged in the "play" of relating. This play is constantly occurring as we are "always already practically engaged in the context of life". Similarly, the play has a to-and-fro movement that is without certainty for the players (Arnason, 1988; Dunne, 1997; Galloway, 2002; Hare, 2005; Macintyre Latta & Hostetler, 2003; Paterson & Zderad, 1975). Indeed, Gadamer (1994) suggests that the play "represents an order in which the to-and-fro motion of play follows of itself". As such, the play does not depend upon those who play it, but on the movement of the play itself (Gadamer, 1994). The embodied experience of play is one "that overcomes us and where our whole being is at stake" (Grondin, 2001.). The players lose themselves in play, as if immersed in the experience. In this way, the play has an influence "over the consciousness of the players" (Dunne, 1997). Further, Dunne (1997) suggests that individuals lose their personal autonomy as they "become a medium in and through which" (p. 136) the play of "relating" moves.

The play has seriousness in terms of how we are being in the world relationally. Each person's way-of-being continuously emerges within the movement of play (Dunne, 1997, 1997; Macintyre Latta et al., 2003). This embodied process of "being-in the- play" involves a dynamic reciprocity as each person is a „becoming“ that opens in the movement of the situation (Arnason, 1988; Blumenfeld-Jones, 1997; Dunne, 1997; Macintyre Latta et al., 2003; Miller, 1996; Paterson et al., 1975; Satina & Hultgren, 2001). In addition, each player and his or her becoming influence the movement of the play itself (Dunne, 1997, 1997; Paterson et al., 1975). The creative process of being in the play draws upon the person's practical knowledge for the immediate and particular situation. Gadamer (1994) uses the term phronesis to describe our

practical knowledge and how it is directed towards the immediate and concrete situation. Our practical knowledge must “grasp the „circumstances“ in their infinite variety” (Gadamer, 1994). In this way, phronesis is intimate to our present experience and indeed the fundamental form of everyday experience (Dunne, 1997, 1997; Macintyre Latta et al., 2003). Aristotle’s (1999) description of phronesis as practical knowledge stands in contrast with theoretical (episteme) and productive (techne) knowledge. In this way, phronesis is not instrumental, “it is its own end” (Lefstein, 2005). Dunne (1997) recognises the ever present phronesis in the play stating, “[practical knowledge] ... is not a knowledge of ethical ideas as such, but rather a resourcefulness of mind that is called into play in, and responds uniquely to, the situation in which these ideas are to be realized”.

The relationship between a teacher and a student is always in play. The play’s movement has the teacher and student continuously engaged in the immediate and concrete situation (Macintyre Latta et al., 2003). Immersed in dynamic and unpredictable relating, the teacher and student move and become in each situation. Previously learned theoretical and productive knowledge about relating gives way to a direction that is found in the phronesis of the situation (Dunne, 1997). The phronesis in and of the moment influences the teacher-student relationship in ways that the techne of the moment might only imagine (Dunne, 1997; Macintyre Latta et al., 2003). While the techne of relating might be useful to the situation, it is the lived experience of relating that has the unpredictability.

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Dunne (1997) suggests that the surprises experienced by players in-the-play show the very fluid reality of the play. In this moment of relating, the movement moves from one of celebration to a sense of confusion and disappointment. While there can be an expectation that the unexpected will occur, this teacher and student seek to find a way through the challenge of this surprise (Hostetler, Macintyre Latta & Sarroub (2007). This is a new moment in their relating, something that was unplanned. Surprise has interrupted “the customary course of events” (Field & Latta, 2001). In the following story, a teacher recalls an unpredictable event that occurs wherein she savours the possibility that the student might be growing towards teaching.

When Peter started his course, he was asking for an extension every time there was an assignment due. And then this happened. He had a death in the family and the grandparents had to come from overseas to the funeral, but were too old to travel on their own. So Peter comes bounding into my office and says, there’s been this death. I am the only one in my family that is not working so I have been elected to go over and fetch the grandparents and bring them back. I have to go on Friday. And I thought, here it comes. Now he’s going to ask for an extension because he had two assignments due. And he said, I’ve got both my assignments ready to hand in early and I want to know if I can

do my presentation to you because I am not going to be in tomorrow to do it with the class. And I just thought, you know, we're getting there with Peter. What a transition from sitting at the back doing nothing to being in the group. I think he's going to be a successful teacher. I was a bit worried at the beginning.

The teacher in this story begins by assuming a familiar pattern of relating. The familiarity is felt in how the student is and how their relating moves in their being together. The teacher speaks her anticipations: "Now he's going ...", "And I thought ..." and "here it comes ...". Experiences like this only heighten the teacher's concern over the student's lack of readiness for teaching. Contrary to what the teacher expected, the student says, "I've got both my assignments ready".. The student was "ready", prepared, organized and acting responsibly. What a surprise! This is indeed a very different moment. These events had not been foreseen. Having thought that the familiar was unfolding, the teacher finds herself in an unpredictable moment. To the teacher's surprise, the student presents completed assignments ahead of time. Suddenly, this moment of relating is recognized as very different from previous patterns of relating. Moreover, this student is relating differently during an emotionally taxing time due to the loss of a family member.

THE PHRONESIS OF PLAY

In this section, the stories show various aspects of phronesis that are primordial to being in the play of relating. Within these stories, the phronesis is shown in terms of its resoluteness, techne, tact, pedagogical thoughtfulness, moral knowing, and attunement amongst other aspects. In the first story of this section a teacher encounters some students whose comments and complaints concerned her and threaten the safety of other students in the class.

The teacher's concern for the dignity of every human being and the student's safety in the classroom, regardless of their culture, shows a moral knowing. Indeed moral knowing and acting are intricately related and essential to a person's actions. Such a moral way of being is primordial to how a person is being-in-the-world. More than acting on a particular situation, a teacher's moral decisions and actions show whether they are "doing the right thing in a particular situation, [that is] seeing what is right within a situation and grasping it" (Gadamer, 1994, p. 317). In this way, Birmingham (2004) suggests that as a virtue, "phronesis is essentially moral" (p. 314). In this story, the teacher's actions call the students to a concern that is within and beyond the present moment; of essence to the teaching vocation.

CONCLUSION

This research paper has focused on the play that is the relationship between a teacher and a student. Such a play exists as the relationship between teacher and student. The players in this play take for granted the moments and movement of the play and its hold over their way of being. In a similar way, the unpredictability and uncertainty of the play is seen in the phronesis

that is opened in the moment in response to the play. Such practical wisdom, or indeed the absence of such, is not engendered as a cognitive act but rather a person's sensitized attunement to the movement of the play. A teacher's phronesis can be seen in their pedagogical tact, nous, resoluteness and their embodied sense of a way-to-be in the moment. Some teachers reveal availability to another's learning that appears to abandon best theoretical understandings and their application. These teachers have a perception of the moment that influences how they are. This sensed knowing is not conceptual but perceptual.

More than the development of theoretical understandings, practical understandings and the development of competencies for application in classroom situations, the pedagogy of teacher educators need to let students learn towards phronesis. Transmission models of learning and calculative thought are counter-productive to developing sensitivities and sensibilities of phronesis. A critically important question remains: how do student teacher's relational experiences with their lecturers enable their growth as teachers who act in the relational play that immediately presents itself as ambiguous, uncertain, and living?

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