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Epistemological Orphans and Childlike Play with Spaghetti: Philosophical Conditions for Transformation.

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Academic biography:

Karin Murris was Visiting Professor at the University of Wales in Newport (UK), then senior lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, and since 1 June 2012 Associate Professor at the School of Education, University of Cape Town, South Africa. She is the author of *Teaching Philosophy with Picture Books*, co-author (with Joanna Haynes) of *Storywise: Thinking through Stories* and *Picturebooks*, *Pedagogy and Philosophy* (2012) by Routledge, Research in Education.

Abstract

This paper is a philosophical response to some critical incidents in a first year philosophy of education course at the Wits School of Education where I used to work. It is an invitation to explore the different philosophies lecturers bring to their pedagogical practice as a means to address, at a theoretical level, the conditions that make transformation possible. I will argue that the kinaesthetic activities that I have incorporated in my teaching and that I actively promote with student teachers and teachers can be regarded at one level as "childish games suitable for 4 and 5 year olds", or at another level, as an acknowledgment of the bodily roots of thinking and all human intellect. The space we inhabit is that of an epistemological orphanage: there are no Fathers to turn to. The aim of the paper is to show how the cooked spaghetti metaphor makes it possible to justify an embodied relational pedagogy and to conclude that transformation at a deep level is made possible only when we allow 'child' to play and we acknowledge the pedagogical implications of reason's 'contamination' by the particular, the anecdotal, the contextual and the emotions. Thinkers do not 'have' bodies, but 'are' bodies, and this perspective influences pedagogical decisions, making learning more inclusive and meaningful, especially for students from more 'underprivileged' backgrounds.

A critical incident

Critical incidents in practice are created[1]. They do not exist independent of an observer, but are produced by the way we interpret a situation. Some of the events in my first year of teaching at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in Johannesburg took me by surprise – they struck me deeply. It was often my emotions that alerted me to the fact that, for example, my responses to an email exchange, a gesture, and expressions of passive resistance involved evaluative judgments (Nussbaum 1990, 2001, 2004). They lead to an increased sensitivity of my own moral values and to a re-examination of my implicit epistemological beliefs and ideas. Some of these incidents I have welcomed as they have helped me shape a deeper understanding of my own pedagogical, moral and political commitments to my students. Without open and explicit dissensus and conflict amongst colleagues there is little freedom within academia to explore existing paradigms and dominant discourses.

For the sake of clarity I will focus on one particular incident only. Typically, at Wits School of Education a weekly lecture is followed by two small group tutorials under the auspices of a team of tutors. With about 800 mainly black

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[1] As explained elsewhere in more detail: Haynes & Murris (forthcoming b).

students, whose command of English is often poor[2], I judged that creating opportunities in the tutorials for inclusive interactive teaching strategies was imperative, in particular to provoke the kind of interaction that would 'mix up' their usual 'automatic' groupings according to race or ethnicity. In the course outline I describe it as follows:

> In the tutorials we will be focusing on turning statements and first-order questions into second-order (more philosophical) questions. Our gained knowledge and understanding will be put to the test in the second tut. Firstly by taking some questions of the first tut and spotting the assumptions, and secondly with the help of a series of questions from your portfolio which we will try and answer in constantly changing pairs (*Mad Hatter's Tea Party*).

The *Mad Hatter's Tea Party* is a kinaesthetic intervention[3] that involves rearranging the furniture in such a way that students sit on chairs (without desks) in two lines 'knees to knees'. Some teachers are more familiar with the name

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[2] Moreover, in 2009 we had an additional group of 229 students from the Limpopo province. They are experienced, mostly middle-aged, female Foundation phase teachers. Sponsored by the provincial government they are completing a 4 year BEd degree in an effort to upgrade their initial training. They are residential and only return home in the holidays. They have taught mainly in sePedi (one of the eleven official South African languages), speak mainly sePedi to each other and after having received their higher education instruction through the medium of English will return to their sePedi speaking schools. It is fair to say that apart from the university classroom most have little systematic exposure to speaking and writing in English.

[3] See: www.reviewing.com for more of Roger Greenaway's reviewing strategies. I have also collected a range of kinaesthetic interventions in an unpublished document called *Thinking Moves* which was given to the students and to the tutors with instructions for classroom implementation. (This document you can download from www.karinmurris.com).

'speed dating' for this activity. Then a task is set, which is carried out with the person opposite for a few minutes (as in this case answering the questions they formulated themselves on a flipchart). Then after a signal from the teacher, all stand up and move one chair to the left (clockwise). The movement constitutes new partners to work with and so on, until the task is completed or time has run out. As long as the task is relevant and links in with students' interest, this inclusive strategy is very effective, judging from students' engaged bodies as well as the outcomes of the pair discussions. However, despite modelling this intervention in our weekly tutors' meeting it became apparent after the tutorial that the majority of tutors with a philosophy background had refused to follow my instructions with their tutorial group. For them philosophy consists of critical engagement with academic texts, not as one philosopher of education put it: playing *"childish games suitable for 4 and 5 year olds"*. He judged such activities to be demeaning – that we should not treat our students as if they were young children. I was unexpectedly made accountable for my pedagogical choices and was struck in particular by his assumptions about the concept 'child'.

The spaghetti metaphor

The challenge I faced was how to *structure* my response, as my pedagogical *practice* is an expression of what Deleuze and Guattari call the 'rhizome', that is, a construction of knowledge as non-hierarchical, without a root, trunk and branches (the tree metaphor of knowledge), but as something that "shoots in all directions with no beginning and end, but always *in between*, and with openings toward other directions and places" (Dahlberg 2003, p. 280). How we construe knowledge and the metaphors we live by and think with, shape our pedagogical practices. The idea of knowledge as a "tangle of spagetti" (Malguzzi quoted in Dahlberg 2003, p. 279)

profoundly challenges habits of thought about development, progression and the organisation and planning of lessons. Strings of spaghetti have ends that are both: endings *and* beginnings. With cooked spaghetti it is often not clear where one string starts and one ends – closely touching and sticking. All strings are of the same shape and size; they are equal. Moreover, in this case the strings are not confined to a bowl. There are no boundaries, there is no map of the territory. The tangle of strings is *infinite*. For Levinas, the idea of infinity "disrupts and dislocates human subjectivity" (Dahlberg 2003, p. 272) in that our knowledge of the Other is always limited and fallible. The metaphor makes it possible to regard students' prior knowledge as a *gift* to extend our own knowledge and understanding as educators, rather than treating personal, private knowledge as a necessary starting point to lead the student down a well-trodden and pre-determined path. As educators, we make a philosophical choice between construing the primary aims of education as socialisation into an *existing* order, or whether the acquisition of knowledge and skills *also* includes strengthening resilience and imagination necessary to construe an order that is non-existing (as yet), but *desirable*. I will return to this in the context of transformation below.

The metaphor of spaghetti opens up possibilities of pedagogical encounters that challenge the familiar constructions of teaching as mediation or "scaffolding" (Wood, Bruner & Ross 1976), whereby the teacher is construed as the knowledge expert who helps the less knowledgeable learner to move one step at a time (like climbing the stairs to 'enlightenment') from the 'unknown' to the 'known' (adult) knowledge. Such practice implies that the teacher asks the questions in class and is regarded as the authority of what counts as valuable knowledge. The adult is supposed to be always one step 'ahead'. In this paper I put forward an alternative conception

whereby teachers make room for learners' questions and prior knowledge and experiences, thereby opening up possibilities to think differently about what knowledge is, and who owns and constructs new knowledges. In this kind of scaffolding the building materials are not made of steel or iron, but of narrative, a use of the body, imagination and fantasy[4]. The shape of the construction is not necessarily square or rectangular, but undetermined. Everyone in class helps to construct the scaffolding and plays on it – taking risks, encountering dangers, ignoring the warning signs, not wearing a crash helmet[5]. Such an alternative epistemological relationship between teacher and learner has moral and political implications. I will argue how it involves moving away from the currently dominant psychological and modernist construction of the individual subject – the teacher – still prevalent in (higher) education.

Now, why is the spaghetti metaphor so illuminating for understanding and justifying my own teaching practices, particularly in post-*Apartheid* South Africa? Firstly, I will take a closer look at the role of metaphors in teaching and learning (one bit of spaghetti). Secondly, I will explore the situated deep dualisms in education and their modernist roots (a bit of spaghetti closely intertwined with the previous). Thirdly, I will explore some non-dualist

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[4] For a theoretical argumentation of this pedagogy see: Haynes, J & K. Murris. (2012) *Picturebooks, Pedagogy and Philosophy*. New York: Routledge (Research in Education Series). For practical guidance, see: Murris, K. & Haynes J. (2002) *Storywise: Thinking through Stories*; international e-book version. Johannesburg: Infonet Publications; www.infonet-publications.com, or for the 2010 international e-book version: Johannesburg: Infonet Publications; www.infonet-publications.com.

[5] It is thanks to private email conversations with Associate Prof Joanna Haynes from the University of Plymouth, UK, that the scaffolding metaphor unfolds in this manner in the paper.

responses and draw the implications for the teaching of thinking and the use of academic texts. I will finish by exploring the distinction between 'childlike' and 'childish' in the context of transformation and return to the critical incident in the university staff room.

Being an epistemological orphan

Italian feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti calls all modern wo/men "epistemological orphans" (Braidotti 1991, p. 2) and puts forward the alternative of the 'nomadic' subject as an invitation to speak about the bodily roots of the thinking process (Braidotti 1991, p. 8). The nomadic subject is continuously 'becoming' – a corporeal entity that has spatio-temporal force – that is, embedded and embodied, and therefore immanent and dynamic (Braidotti 2006 pp. 151-2). Her critique of liberal individualism and instrumental rationality has implications for any theoretical work in philosophy, which she calls a "building site" and that involves "…selection of elements, the distribution of tasks, and the overall plan for the project are the key to what is called the 'materiality' of ideas" (Braidotti 1991, p. 2). The craftsmanship involved is not that of building scaffolds with pre-determined structures: the material and the shape are unpredictable, infinite and relational. Our unavoidable historical condition, she claims, is to suffer "ontological insecurity" and a loss of paternal authority (Braidotti 1991, p. 2). Philosophy can no longer be seen as a rational activity of system building, but "*a thinking through the body*" and "working with ideas which are programmes for action rather than dogmatic blocks" (Braidotti 1991 p. 3; p. 8). Although philosophy may not involve building a system with secure 'foundations', there is a structure nevertheless. In order to appreciate the implications of the 'nomadic' subject for teaching and learning, and how this connects with the *Mad Hatters Tea Party* activity, I need to make a few historical links.

There is much talk about postmodernism, but not as much in educational circles about the epistemological roots of 'modernism' and what postmodernism is a response to. I will start by outlining some core distinctions in Western epistemology, and argue how these have been problematised in contemporary philosophy. The main thrust of my argument is about the relationship between language and reality, knowledge and understanding and the educational implications of what it means to be an 'epistemological orphan'.

Western epistemology since Ancient Greece has focused on answering the central question: *How can the knowing subject have certain knowledge of a world (the object) that is in constant flux, therefore is always unreliable and deceptive?* (Famously, Greek philosopher Heraclitus claimed that we can never step in the same river twice.) Over the centuries, philosophers have developed various answers to this core question. The need to bridge the 'gap' between the *subject* and the *object* and the attempt by philosophers to secure the foundations of true knowledge has resulted in commonly held beliefs about truth (correspondence between subject and object), knowledge as infallible, ever-expanding and transmittable, and the belief that a progressive movement to intellectual perfection requires control over the body and mastery over the emotions.

Why is this so? The subject/object distinction found an influential re-interpretation (since Plato) in the works of French philosopher René Descartes – the Father of modernity. He lived in the seventeenth century and settled the notion of the mind (the subject) – as a separate entity, located in 'inner space' – firmly in Western philosophical tradition, that is, the mind as a *substance* in which mental processes occur. To quote one of Descartes' most famous passages:

> I am a thinking thing, or a *substance* whose whole *essence* or nature consists in thinking. And although...I have a body to which I am very closely united, nevertheless... it is certain that I, that is to say, my mind, by which I am what I am, is entirely and truly distinct from my body, and may exist without it (Descartes 1968, p. 156).

Descartes had borrowed the notion of 'substance' from Aristotle, as one of the categories with which we structure reality. Anything that has independent existence, or can 'stand on its own', such as stones, chairs and trees are a substance, as opposed to skills, emotions or colours. Problems arise of course when we want to categorise very small objects, such as molecules or atoms, or very large objects such as the earth or the universe (Leal & Shipley, 1992:35). Nevertheless for most people the way in which material objects exist, is the paradigm for deciding whether something exists (is real) or not. For Descartes, the world consists of two different kinds of substances: *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. The latter is "...the normal Aristotelian kind, the material object", whilst the former is "...consciousness or mind – in Kant's celebrated phrase, "this I or he (or she) or it which thinks" (Leal & Shipley 1992, p. 35). This transcendental self[6] is what people often refer to as their 'fundamental "me"', their 'core', their 'I', the 'whatever-it-is that makes them the person they *are*'.

Leal and Shipley point out that of the two substances, the mind is regarded as privileged over the body, in the sense that "...self-knowledge of the mind is superior and indubitable (in fact incorrigible), whereas knowledge of the body (by the mind) is hypothetical, uncertain and derivative" (Leal & Shipley 1992, p. 42 footnote 16), or, put differently,

contemplative life is superior to active life. Many people, sometimes unknowingly, are Cartesian dualists. Leal and Shipley offer, by way of a psychological explanation, the tendency in human beings to "...make an unbreachable gap between themselves and everything else, particularly other people; in abstract, and somewhat psychoanalytic, language, a split between self and not self" (Leal & Shipley 1992, p. 34). Lakoff and Johnson explain the need for such a split by referring to what they describe as one of human beings' basis instincts: *territoriality*. They explain:

> We are physical beings, bounded and set off from the rest of the world by the surface of our skins, and we experience the rest of the world as outside us. Each of us is a container with a bounding surface, an in-out orientation. We project our own in-out orientation onto other physical objects...[but we also]...impose this orientation on our natural environment (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, p. 29).

This urge to divide the world up into the mental and the physical is 'metaphysical' as "...it involves a method of knowing about the world prior to and untouchable by empirical science" (Rorty 1980, p. 18). This "deep dualism"[7] (Leal & Shipley 1992, p. 34) that influences how we think, is not a mere harmless theoretical stance, but has *practical* consequences for how we act and treat people and regard knowledge. Descartes' famous dictum 'I think, therefore I am' (*cogito ergo sum*) constructed a particular subjectivity in Western thought: "a subject that constitutes and defines itself through its own constructive activity" (Dahlberg 2003, p. 264). Influenced by Taylor, Dahlberg argues that "in modernity the autonomous and self-conscious subject has been the locus of certainty and truth and the first principle

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[6]   'Transcendental' for Immanuel Kant means 'the-condition-of the-possibility-of' of having this or that kind of experience. For example, without 'time' and 'space' I could not do any mathematical sum. See: Der transzendentalen Aesthetik. In I. Kant, *Kritik Der Reinen Vernunft (Critique of Pure Reason)*, pp. 66-94.

[7] Leal and Shipley call it *deep* dualism, first because it has such a "profound grip on us", but also, they claim, because it underlies all other dualisms (Leal & Shipley, 1992, p. 35).

from which everything arises and to which all must be returned" (Dahlberg: 2003:264).

Non-dualist responses

Postmodernism is a critical response to the notion of the individual, logo-centric subject influenced in particular by Heidegger, and also Wittgenstein's work *The Philosophical Investigations* (Murris, 1997)[8]. Both Wittgenstein and Heidegger reject virtually all dualistic vocabularies: subject and object, self and world, self and other, mind and body. Wittgenstein offers us a new theory of meaning, with far-reaching consequences for how we understand concepts. In *Sein und Zeit (Being and Time)* (1979), Heidegger forcefully shows how the metaphysical and epistemological tradition since Plato has infiltrated our everyday language and consciousness, and has resulted in the dualistic image we have of ourselves, other people, and our relation to the world. Peters describes how mind/body dualism has "developed as an instrument for 'othering': of separating boys from girls, reason from emotion, minorities from the dominant culture, and classes from each other" (Peters 2004, p. 14). Although Wittgenstein acknowledges that we *do* have privileged access to our own thinking (e.g. I can keep my own feelings and thoughts secret), he denies the possible *ontological* implications – the mind as a substance, as *res cogitans*. We are the authority as far as *knowing* about our thoughts is concerned, but this authority is epistemological (about how we know) and not ontological (about the material that we know). Hence, the mind, or psyche are not separate entities in this world, although these concepts do have meaning in our language.

Wittgenstein argued for an acknowledgment of the *social* component of our thinking. It is a community of language-users that teaches us the concepts we use in thinking, which gives language its meaning. Heidegger added the *historical* dimension (Rorty 1980, p.12): we have to distance ourselves from a language that presupposes that people can be 'carved up' into those separate entities 'body' and 'mind'. People are understood as thinking, whole persons, being already *in* the world, and not thinking *about* the world. We should not dichotomise the thinker, and what the thinker is thinking about, as if they were separate ontological entities. Both Wittgenstein and Heidegger initiated the *linguistic turn* characteristic of contemporary thought. The knowing subject does not have 'direct' access to the world it is thinking about or studying; understanding is always mediated by the languages (including mathematical and scientific symbolic languages) used in constructing knowledge.

For example, returning to the concept 'substance', this notion may be *linguistically* useful, but it does not inform us about what things are like in 'the world', or, as Russell puts it:

> 'Substance', in one word, is a metaphysical mistake due to the transference to the world's structure of the structure of sentences, composed of a subject and predicate (Russell 1970, pp. 196-7).

What he is saying is that, for example, the structure of the sentence "My mind is blank" makes us believe that there is this thing (mind) in the world that has a quality (blankness), and that this quality exists apart from the substance (mind). Wittgenstein would agree: we call some mental state 'hope', 'love', 'expectation', 'feeling' or 'thought', not because of some essence, but because of the context in which it is used. It is the *context* that gives words and concepts their meaning: "A smiling mouth *smiles* only in a human face"[9]

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[8] Also, by the thinking of the American Pragmatists, but I have restricted myself here to two main thinkers only.

[9]This is my translation of: "*Ein lächelnder Mund **lächelt** nur in einem menschlichen Gesicht*". In L.Wittgenstein.

Teaching Thinking

Highly relevant for the teaching of thinking is the context in which the concept 'thinking' is *used* in human practices or 'way of life' (Wittgenstein, 1971). 'Thinking' cannot be *defined*, since asking the question, "what does it mean to think?" can only be answered by thinking (Heidegger 1968, p. xii). We *are* thinking. Not this subject (mind) 'imprisoned' in this object (body) is thinking *about* the world, but we are always already "there", that is, *in* the world. "*Dasein*", translated as "Being-there" 'replaces' the subject (mind) (Heidegger 1979, par. 2). Since *Dasein* is always thinking about its own thinking – an *activity* rather than a thing – it cannot take a detached (subject-object) view of itself (that would mean regarding itself as a thing). It is for this reason that thinking does not need external justification: it is not a means to other ends. Thinking is always *underway* (*unterwegs*). It is for this reason that Heidegger believes the teacher-student relationship should be like that between master and apprentice in the medieval guilds – to let "learning occur" (Heidegger 1968, p. vi). Todd critiques Heidegger's individualist notion of *Dasein*. She highlights the implications of Heidegger's own notion of *Mitsein* for human subjectivity: 'being-in-the-world-with-others' as part of the human existential condition. Drawing on Hannah Arendt, Todd writes: "We are born into an already populated realm through which action and speech are founded ('natality') and therefore existence cannot be abstracted from co-existence" (Todd 2010). Individuals are unique through human relationships, through the space in-between people. It is through the events of speaking and

Philosophische Untersuchungen. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971, par. 583. It does not mean, however, that Wittgenstein adopts a behaviourist point of view. Wittgenstein argues that behaviourism itself is a metaphysical position. First of all, the behaviourist accepts the Cartesian mind/body dualism, rejects mind as being real, and is then left with human behaviour.

acting that uniqueness emerges. Uniqueness is contextual, specific and embodied (Todd 2010). Humans always already find themselves 'in' time and space, and therefore they bring to any meaning-making processes their own prejudices and socially, culturally and historically situated understandings. What is crucial for teaching and learning is that the 'in', in 'being-**in**-time' and 'being-**in**-space', is not understood in a *psychological* sense, but in an *ontological* sense. Psychological methods tend to rely on individuals accessing their experiences with the help of the senses and/or introspection. The profound contribution Heidegger has made to the history of ideas and the development of post-modern thought is the radical idea that *bodily existence* (being) and not the individual (beings) is ontologically prior, that is, individuals always already find themselves surrounded by beings (including others). This shift in thinking has made the development of, for example, (post)structuralist, constructivist and other non-dualist relational pedagogies possible.

So how should we teach thinking, if thinking is *an event between people*, an *activity* and not a *thing*, and therefore cannot become an *object* for either scientific study (e.g. to be broken down into skills), or philosophical speculation (e.g. to determine its 'essence')? As I have argued, to regard thinking as an object of study would assume the possibility of taking a spectator view of thinking; as if humans were able to think about thinking from the 'outside' as it were (the spaghetti is infinite). Gert Biesta reiterates the epistemological impossibility of humans being the *source* of all knowledge and at the same time the *object* of that knowledge (Biesta 2006, p. 4). What is being proposed is a nomadic subject: a subject that is embodied, and whose essence depends on its existence with others (through bodily interaction and communicative relationships).

Thinking is an *experience*, an activity, that happens *in the space between* people who *are* bodies, who do not just *have* bodies. This importantly includes the emotions – 'even' in the teaching of thinking. Emotions are not fixed entities, or feelings 'inside' our 'selves' that need to be managed or controlled, but are complex *judgments*, as linguistic *concepts*. Emotions are often intelligent responses to dynamic social relationships; they alert us to the moral dimension of our existence (Murris 2009). Such a take requires an abandonment of the still popular Platonic conception of emotions as inner, private, mental states. An essentialist, psychological understanding of emotions strips the individual subject from its context.

The linguistic turn has turned us all into epistemological orphans. The idea of certain knowledge has become problematic with the abandonment of all subject/object dualisms, which is the condition of the possibility of a correspondence theory of truth – the idea that knowledge is infallible and transmittable, and that emotions can be mastered.

It is often wrongly claimed that postmodernism implies epistemological relativism. It is indeed true that knowledge is always situated in time and space, so there is no view from 'nowhere'. It is also true that views are always from 'somewhere' (the entangled strings of spaghetti are infinite, so we cannot have a *whole view*), but it does not follow that there is no view at all, or, that all views are equally valid. Knowledge acquisition is not about looking for beginnings and endings, but the *action*, the activity of putting a fork in the spaghetti and gradually moving outwards[10].

The role of academic texts

Philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer's groundbreaking work *Truth and Method* (1975) is a powerful challenge to the idea that academic texts can be interpreted objectively and from a certain, external, secure vantage point by an educator. The process of making sense of a text always involves a "fusion of the contexts of both interpreter and text" and requires a "relationship of vulnerability to the text" and an attempt to be 'fully open' in the conversation between reader and text (Dunne 1993, p. 105; p. 115). Gadamer's 'hermeneutics' implies that meanings are not already contained 'in' the text, but "the meaning of the text has its *being* in the conversations in which it is brought into partnership". A text, Joseph Dunne, continues:

> …is always released into a semantic field, beyond the reach of its author, and is charged with possibilities of meaning that become actual only in virtue of movements in the rest of the field. It is the dynamism of history itself that constitutes this field and within it there is the meaning of the text. It is in this sense that Gadamer speaks of time (i.e. the time elapsed between the production of a text and its subsequent interpretation) not as a "gulf" but as a "supportive ground" (Dunne 1993, p. 118).

Influenced by Heidegger, Gadamer regards hermeneutics as the most fundamental, pre-scientific mode of being-in-the-world. Understanding a text is not the outcome of critical, propositional thinking processes, but includes a pre-reflective, pragmatic know-how that reveals itself through the way in which our bodies orient themselves in the world[11].

Teaching practice can have an 'open texture' (Dunne 1993, p. 379) and be a 'hands-on' encounter, if we allow students to make connections collaboratively between

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[10] Thanks to ex-colleague Theresa Giorza from the University of Witwatersrand for coming up with this idea.

[11] http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermeneutics/#Turn (accessed 17 July 2010)

their prior knowledge and experiences when making sense of academic texts. From an American pragmatist perspective, Brinkmann and Tanggaard argue that ideas are tools for the embodied knower to transform, engage with and cope with the world. Truth, they say, is not correspondence with an 'external' reality and knowledge a representation of the world as-it-is, but a *tool* for manipulating and handling the world for human purposes. (Brinkmann & Tanggaard 2009, pp. 243-4; p. 253). One moment in our experience leads to another and then to another, *ad infinitum*, like endless strings of spaghetti.

By drawing on their own lived experiences, students can make connections to help fit parts of a text into meaningful, coherent wholes (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, pp. 172-175). Kieran Egan, for example, argues how the body helps mediate abstract concepts such as 'cold' and 'hot'. The initial discriminations of temperature as 'hotter' or 'colder' than one's own body temperature, helps a learner understand the mediating concept 'warm' (Egan, 1995, p. 120). Many scientific concepts have lost the original connection between language and embodiment (Levering 2006, pp. 455-6; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Johnson, 2007).

For students to have the opportunity to ask their *own* questions in tuts helps them make their *own* meaningful connections through the event of thinking with others. The past is always active in reading an academic text in the present, even when humans are not conscious of this fact. Readers bring their own historicity and temporality to their interpretations of any resource used in teaching. .

There are many factors that influence such encounters between students and tutors: the context of the environment in which the teaching takes place: the walls, the furniture in the room, the weather, the presence of other bodies in the room; their scent, their size, their clothing. The expressions on their faces, what these bodies say, what they

do, how they listen. We get to know, not only the texts better, but also ourselves through such relationships with others and our environment. Nussbaum reminds us that a "large part of learning takes place in the experience of the concrete" (Nussbaum 1990, p. 44). Todd argues that transformation is a "pedagogical act". She writes: "pedagogy, like the motherless boy, is founded on a second birth – one that is bound up with the relational aspects of being present in context with others (Todd 2010). Our presence in the world as educators is always an engagement with a particular context and this includes connecting with our own bodies and those of our students in the room.

The various metaphors I have used in this paper challenge how we think about teaching, the norms we use to evaluate our educational practices and how we use academic texts in Higher Education. But is playing with spaghetti through the use of the body indeed a "childish" activity? Mad Hatter's[12], for short, is indeed playful, but would it be fair to say that it is also "childish" – the sort of activity that does not belong in academia? Am I wasting their time? Am I doing my students a disservice by not preparing them properly for the reading of academic texts? I would like to resist the either/or implications of the latter question, and suggest that I intend (and hopefully succeed) to do *both*. That is, the pedagogical

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[12] The *Mad Hatter's Tea Party* is only one strategy I sometimes use when I judge it to be helpful to explore a range of questions. I often make those professional judgments at the spur of the moment as, for example, at a school in-service training in Johannesburg in February 2010. The data-projector stopped working and I asked all 70 staff to take their chairs outside in the garden and construct 2 rows opposite each other. As it happened it allowed a very useful time for teachers to explore questions they had generated earlier that day, at the same time allowing the technicians to fix the audio-visual equipment.

processes I engage my students in, helps them access academic texts. In academic writing, academics put arguments forward, respond, and more or less successfully build on each other's ideas. Albeit static and 'stretched out in time' the structure resembles that of an infinite dialogical tangle of spaghetti. Means and ends are intricately interwoven. The inter-connectedness of having intelligent conversations (Wegerif 2002) and philosophical thinking is largely ignored in the teaching of philosophy. However, philosophy *is* dialogue – with oneself, with others, with text books, philosophical writings, or visual images. As John Locke has pointed out: teaching children how to reason is best achieved by engagement in practices that call for reasoning behaviour rather than teaching particular rules or procedures (Locke 1978). Involving students in embodied verbal *reasoning practices* requires an approach to education which is tolerant and responsive to differences of opinion. This necessitates not only a different approach to the content of the university curriculum and the way teacher education institutions are organised, but also how it nurtures good quality teaching[13]. The lecturer cannot be all-knowing and infallible (Bottery 1990, pp. 238-239). Also, a shift in teachers' attitude is necessary which would be an expression of a different kind of "attitude to epistemology in general, one which is aware of its tentativeness and changeable nature, is tolerant of criticism, is open-minded, and aware of its fallibility" (Bottery 1990, p. 238). Russell urges us "to keep alive that speculative interest in the universe which is apt to be killed by confining ourselves to

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[13] For example, at the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, pressure on staff to do research and publish is similar to that of other departments within the Faculty of Humanities. No allowances are made for the fact that, unlike other departments, a teacher education institution has the extra responsibility of modelling good quality teaching practices.

definitely ascertainable knowledge" (Russell 1982, pp. 89-91).

Childlike, not childish

> Play is what children do, not because they are in a state of innocence, but because they are perpetually learning, perpetually becoming… (Lewis 2001, p. 81).

What counts as 'child' is philosophically problematic (Matthews, 1994) and normative in that it applies to "a period of developmental preparation both for adulthood as it now is, and for an ideal adulthood that has not yet been realized" (Friquegnon 1997, p.12). Friquegnon argues how authoritarian education, based on the apprenticeship model of education, values children as *inadequate adults* and requires punitive training to extinguish childishness and to ensure that a child is 'adultlike' as soon as possible.

As "a mutually necessary contrastive pair", 'child' is unthinkable without 'adult' and vice versa (Kennedy 2000, pp. 215-6). Whatever we say about 'child' also implies judgments about 'adult'. Matthews argues that, for example, the universalising tendency of Western developmental psychology encourages educators to 'distance' themselves – "both from the children around us and from our own childhood selves" (Matthews, 1994:66). Such distancing often leads to "condescension", which Matthews argues is "morally offensive". Matthews suggests that to engage with *individual* children as rational, active, collaborative participants in knowledge construction as their "simple directness", often "bring us back to basics" (Matthews 1994, p. 67). Generalising about children's abilities fails to do justice to the capacities of *individual* children (Murris 1997).

Only since the start of liberal education has an appreciation developed for the intrinsic childlike qualities of childhood in the West (Friquegnon 1997, pp. 13-14)

such as openness, curiosity, playfulness, enthusiasm, honesty, embodied meaning-making and trust. Adults who display such qualities are often praised as being childlike, in contrast to the pejoratively used 'childish' adults (Friquegnon 1997, p. 14). Friquegnon argues that the common confusion between 'childlike' and 'childish' has meant that the former is often regarded as incompatible with adult responsibility (as e.g. in much child-centered education inspired by Rousseau).

In the Middle Ages, on the other hand, there was no distinction between 'childish' and 'childlike': adults and children played the same games and equally engaged with myths, fairy-tales, magic and miracles (Friquegnon 1998, p. 2). Literature specifically for children developed much later. In traditional African societies there is also no distinction between work and play and childhood is not necessarily viewed as a stage of incompetence. Viewing children as capable has much to do with living at subsistence level when taking up 'adult responsibilities' starts early (including participating in warfare) (Twum-Danso 2005, pp. 12-13). Although childhood has been understood in different ways across cultures and different historical periods, Archard argues that it would be a simplification to conclude that childhood is a social construction. Influenced by Rawls, he makes a helpful distinction between *concept* and *conception* (Archard 2004, pp. 27-31). The concept of childhood is necessarily linked to that of adulthood: childhood as the absence of adulthood. It is also necessarily linked to age – "children are young human beings" (Archard 2004, p. 29). Increasingly educators argue that the 'passage' from child to adult comes at a price: a gradual demise of imaginative, metaphorical, embodied and original thinking, so characteristic of young children (see e.g. Egan, 1992, 1993, 1997).

To what extent this demise is seen as a loss depends on one's *conception* of childhood. So, all societies have a concept of childhood (and is therefore not just a social construction), but their conceptions differ (Archard 2004, p. 28). Childhood is *also* a biological phenomenon, but biology not understood as a set of facts, immutable across time and space. They are not merely brute facts of the given, but "represent the claims of particular scientific discourses" and "social, political, geographical, and economical factors have caused the construction of 'immaturity', i.e., "a child's physical nature relative to adults" (Archard, 2004, p. 26). So, all societies have a *concept* of childhood, but their *conceptions* differ, according to the extent (when does it finish?), its nature (what exactly constitutes the difference between child and adult?), and the significance adults attach to these differences (Archard 2004, p. 31; Matthews, 1994).

Different conceptions of childhood reveal the physical and metaphysical assumptions humans attach to 'child', and inform the distinction generally made between 'childish' and 'childlike'. Developmental theories are an expression of an "abstract disembodied psychological subject" with the individual child abstracted from its social context (Burman 2008a, p. 294). Such essentialising of child is characteristic of developmental theories that equate the history of the individual with the history of mankind. These normative recapitulation theories (Matthews, 1994) assume that the 'progress' civilisations have made from oral, irrational, mythical, embodied knowledge to written, rational, detached, abstract, disembodied knowledge is reflected in the maturational process of a child becoming an adult. Burman argues that Western sentimentalised representations of children as immature, innocent, unknowing, helpless and in need of protection are attempts to deny children agency, and perpetuates the false belief that young people cannot be responsible,

active, co-constructors of knowledge (Burman 2008a, p. 293).

What this brief analysis of the various conceptions of childhood shows is the hidden subjectivity of claims to 'adultlike' knowledge, as asocial, rational (in a disembodied manner), so deeply dualistic in the Cartesian sense. Not only 'the' child is essentialised, but by the same token 'the' adult. Allowing oneself to *be* also 'childlike' involves engaging with a conception of rationality that does not sever thought from action, emotion from the intellect, form from content or the abstract from the concrete. For teaching and learning it implies a relational approach that emphasises an attentiveness to the presence of the bodies in a classroom, bodies without 'insides' and 'outsides' but engaged in lived experiences. Being-in-the-present with students requires a tentative openness to the thinking of the Other through verbal and bodily communication, such as the movement of hands, expressions of anger or confusion, collaborative reflection, negotiation and responsive listening. Furthermore, it requires the educator to draw on other particular child*like* qualities, such as the use of imagination, metaphors, being curious, having a sense of fun in order to be fully human. Metaphors, Bruner contends, are "the crutches to help us get up the abstract mountain" and as soon as we are 'up' we hide the crutches or throw them away by replacing them for formal, logically consistent theories expressed preferably in mathematical terms (Bruner 1986, p. 48). In the process we remain unaware of the reductionist assumptions that result from this 'forgetfulness' of the history of how language grows through metaphors. We have forgotten that:

> Abstract words are ancient coins whose concrete images in the busy give-and-take of talk have worn away with use (Jaynes 1990, p. 51).

Connecting with the lived experiences of our students, making room for playing with spaghetti and metaphors is central to making academic texts meaningful. Instead of treating these texts as units of information, and demanding from students that they regurgitate 'the' meaning or essence of them in assignments and exams, the role of embodiment has implications for how we view teaching and learning. What an academic text *means* includes pre-verbal and lived experiences, not merely what can be understood intellectually. Reasoning about such texts collaboratively is a situated embodied human *practice*, which is neither a universal, nor a necessary, mechanical application of logical rules (Burbules 1995, pp. 85-88). 'Scaffolding' takes on a different meaning and requires making room for students' own understandings, their bodies, and a creative use and self-reflective critical stance towards the metaphors we use as lecturers when justifying our teaching practices.

Implications for transformation in the South African context

The 1994 elections announced the birth of a new democracy in South Africa and the death of the *apartheid* regime. This political shift had dramatic implications for the transformation of education from an authoritarian system focusing on the reproduction of fixed knowledge for the privileged few (mainly white) learners, to an educational system that in principle included all children, with a contextualised constructivist approach to knowledge as laid down in Curriculum 2005 (Green 2000). The historical inequities in South Africa were so extreme, which may explain (in contrast to other white-settler countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada) the current passionate academic debate in teacher training institutions on "the purity of knowledge-domains" or academic "gate-keeping" (Michelson 2004, p. 26, footnote 8). The constructivist project is seen as a

"breakdown between boundaries" between academic and local (prior) knowledge resulting in "promiscuous combinations of abstract and concrete thought" (Michelson 2004, p. 8; p. 23). Osman argues for a space at university that includes and explores "new forms of scholarship about knowing through experience and knowing through action" (Osman 2004, p. 312). Importantly, she emphasises understanding the value of informal, prior knowledge for its own sake, rather than measured against academic knowledge (Osman 2004, p. 306). For widening access to academia to include students from more 'underprivileged' backgrounds, the post-dualist view that knowledge is "a process that weaves the private and public lives of human beings into integrated and whole realities" (Osman 2004, p. 306) is an exciting promise.

Todd argues that educational theory has been quite consumed with the socialising and reproductive function of education as 'formation' – a shaping of children for the future. For trans/formation, however, she proposes shifting the focus to "who they are in the present…. despite whether or not this alteration leads to the formation we desire" (Todd 2010). With a focus on process and relational exchanges, she argues that "pedagogy enables us to think about how our becoming someone is necessarily transformative". Embodied relational pedagogy makes room for relating to students as competent resourceful creative Others who enrich the educational experience, blurring dichotomies between the educator and the educated. The focus of teaching turns to *the space in between* people. Derrida urges educators to engage with and take responsibility for a future still to come - teaching that "interrupts the philosophical tradition of making ourselves as the master over the child" (Dahlberg 2003, p. 273).

A wealth of contemporary cross-disciplinary literature (see e.g. Burman 2008a,b; Valencia, 2010) is an urgent call for deconstruction of some commonly held beliefs about our students who apparently 'lack' skills, have 'needs', are 'lazy', 'incompetent', 'immature', 'impoverished' or 'disadvantaged'. As these assumptions about our students are reflections of how children are often regarded and treated at schools, rupturing such modernist habits of thoughts at university is urgent and essential. Sites such as initial teacher education should model educators listening in a radically open way, offering opportunities for enjoyable mutually enriching dialogue and exchanges of experiences. The dichotomies that continue to inform pedagogical choices in education feed 'deficit thinking'. Valencia explains that one of the six characteristics of deficit thinking is "a person-centred explanation of school failure among individuals as linked to group membership (typically, the combination of racial minority status and economic disadvantagement)" (Valencia 2010, p. 18). Focusing on the so-called 'internal' deficits or deficiencies of the students obscures and distracts educators from taking moral responsibility. The 'otherisation' of our students prevents us from critically reflecting on our own pedagogical practices, and tends to exclude students who are most unlike ourselves. The alternative, dialogical engagement with and between embodied selves must be pursued with a sensitive political will on the part of educators: through relinquishing authority and unlearning assumptions routinely made about students; and through explicit attention to relational pedagogy and communication at university. Students' own questions should drive and motivate the learning process as, for example, is the case in the *Mad Hatter's Tea Party* strategy outlined at the beginning of this paper.

Mad Hatter's Tea Party

Who asks the questions in class is a profound political question (see Haynes & Murris, 2012).The use of the body in the Mad Hatter's activity is deliberate. The knees of the students almost touch and room is made to engage with the person sitting opposite, away from a plenary gaze. Their thinking changes and deepens through their experience of the presence of the Other: the movement of the hands, their skin, their smiles, their energy, the words that come out of their mouths, their silences. Current changes in learning and teaching practices, technologies and theories reflect a change to embrace other means of meaning making that include the visual, the aesthetic and the kinaesthetic (Johnson 1987, 2007). The thinking body is also a feeling body. Who we are, where we live and what we feel, affect our reasoning processes. Our body is not only an object of knowledge, but also a knowing, sentient being (Burkitt 1999, p. 61). The body and its location is significant for how knowledge is constructed. Meaning and understanding is constructed through social and interpersonal engagement. This contrasts starkly with the Cartesian view referred to at the beginning of this paper.

Mad Hatter's can be used with large groups. I sometimes use the space in the corridor or outside. The kinaesthetic dimension enables students to explore ideas and learn from a large variety of others in a relatively short space of time. The activity is meaningful, because the students are given the opportunity to locate the new knowledge from the text and the lecture in a framework which is connected to something in their own lived experience, something which already makes sense to them (Splitter & Sharp 1995, p. 68). Only after students have had the opportunity to construct their own answers to the set task (*Is this question philosophical or not?*), each question is discussed and feedback invited from the students. The teacher facilitates the process and guides the activity, but resists

intervening in the content initially. Content knowledge is not sacrificed, but used by the teacher by imaginatively connecting with the ideas put forward by the students, and by weaving in new ideas, offering other perspectives, or linking students' contributions. Strings of spaghetti are re-structured. It is the differences between the people in the room that provide such rich educational opportunities. Diversity and difference are not intimidating barriers, but enrich the learning process. As Burbules and Rice argue, respect across differences can be developed only when mirrored in the pedagogy, because:

> We learn by making connections between what we know and what is new to us: this cognitive process is paralleled and fostered developmentally, by the communicative relations in which we are engaged from a very early age (Burbules & Rice 1991, pp. 412-413).

Students find it considerably easier to voice their own points of view after they have been given the opportunity to bounce off ideas with peers on a 1:1 basis. Critical and creative discussions naturally emerge if the teacher allows herself to be surprised and moved by the thinking and being of the others. For transformation, the inclusion of relational pedagogies is especially urgent in Higher Education institutions that prepare future teachers, as their own practices are likely to be replicated in future classrooms.

Accepting the human 'condition' as that of an epistemological orphan involves a fresh re-thinking of the role of embodiment, the relationship between thinking and talking (the importance of oracy or verbal reasoning) and what it means to think about thinking (including the idea what philosophy *is*). If thinkers are (also) bodies, the use of kinaesthetic activities is not a random pedagogical decision that may or may not help engage students, but

offers opportunities for thinkers to *experience* first-hand the *presence* of the other.

A more embodied view of what 'thinking' is, changes how lecturers regard their own role as facilitators of learning, how they plan their lessons, what strategies they use and what they regard as the 'products' of their teaching. At a deep level it raises the question of what it means to prepare one's lessons and how the otherness of the student is incorporated in one's teaching. It involves a rejection of several practices of modern education: separating our students by seating them in rows, regarding books and papers as the main transmitters of knowledge with lecturers having privileged access, and the giving of definitions as expressions of understanding concepts.

This paper has argued that for transformation a deconstruction of the core Cartesian dualism between the knowing subject and the object is urgent as it has shaped other dichotomies between skills/content, cognition/emotion, how/what, process/content, public/private knowledge, teacher/learner, and importantly adult/child. Transformation at a deep level is possible only when in teaching thinking we allow 'childlike' play with spaghetti and acknowledge the pedagogical implications of reason's 'contamination' by the particular, the anecdotal, the contextual and the emotions. Thinkers do not 'have', but 'are' bodies, and this perspective influences pedagogical decisions, making learning more inclusive and meaningful especially for students from more 'underprivileged' backgrounds who struggle to access academic texts in the traditional manner.

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