Body, culture and education. An hermeneutical perspective

Jordi Planella Ribera
Universidad Oberta de Cataluña (UOC), España
jplanella@uoc.edu

Antonio Almeida
Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, España
antonio.almeida@ulpgc.es

Núria Castro-Lemus
Universidad de Sevilla
ncastro@us.es

Abstract

In this article we review the ways in which bodies interact with pedagogic discourse and praxis. We have looked, through hermeneutic pedagogy, at the forms of concealment and emancipation of student’s bodies. Moving on from the original idea, that learner’s bodies have been habitually objectified; it is possible to speak of embodiment or of the subjectivity of bodies, using a hermeneutic approach.

Key words: pedagogy of the body, subjectivity, embodiment, pedagogical hermeneutics.

Cuerpo, cultura y educación. Una perspectiva hermeneútica

Resumen

En este artículo revisamos las formas en que los cuerpos interactúan con el discurso y la praxis pedagógica. Hemos examinado la pedagogía hermenéutica, las formas de ocultamiento y emancipación de los cuerpos de los estudiantes. Originariamente, los cuerpos de los alumnos habitualmente se han objetivado; es posible hablar sobre la invención de cuerpos, utilizando un enfoque hermenéutico.

INTRODUCTION

In this article, we start from the supposition that education gives shape, and that the body’s shape, or form, is linked to the educational process (GOMEZ, GALLO & PLANELLA, 2018). At the same time, subject’s bodies are given shape and form through the exercise of social construction. The process is the following: the raw material of the subject (the body, understood in its Körper dimension) is modified, transformed, shaped or deformed, by the contextual elements of the process (VILLALOBOS, 2017; VILLALOBOS, 2018). If the subject allows him or herself to be modified, (s) he becomes the object of formation through what we can call a closed corporal curriculum. In the closed corporal curriculum bodies are formed based on a series of criteria that can be organized as follows: silent bodies (not carrying textualities); normalized bodies (that adjust themselves to the measurements/characteristics/aesthetics defined by the context); uniform bodies (that cannot be read nor interpreted in different ways); physical bodies (that do not have a symbolic perspective) and obedient bodies (which submit themselves to the bio political elements that define pedagogical praxes, without offering bodily resistance).
2-BODY AND CULTURE IN EDUCATION

If we look at the work of JUDOVITZ (2001), we come to understand that the recovery of bodily subjectivity demands the presence and resuscitation of the cultural in the bodies of the learners. To do this, based on the work of Cassirer, it seems necessary to take a more profound look at the concept of the culture of the body. The culture of the body has shifted many times throughout the history of pedagogical discourse and praxis (Pallarès, 2019). It has moved from a terrain in which the body has been excluded into a terrain in which the body has been made an object of veneration. In these pedagogic-corporal wanderings, from pedagogies that have been characterized by their desire to subdue and control learner’s bodies, to technological pedagogies in which the body becomes a surplus element, we can reconstruct a pedagogic and corporal history that brings us closer to a cultural reading of the question.

However, why do we insist on bringing the body into the cultural terrain? In a study dedicated to hermeneutic pedagogy, Esteban points to one of the possible reasons: all the pedagogic, culturalist, dialectic, narrative etc. alternatives clash time and time again with the interested hardening of the instrumental derivation of reason as it converts reality into a simple, objectifiable, unequivocal and manageable entity (2002,19). It is by bringing education closer to corporeity that we can avoid the discourse and praxis that turn the bodies of the subjects into bodies, that can be read from a simplified,
objectified point of view, having no possible interpretation, and easy to “manipulate”.

It is precisely through thinking of the body from the point of view of its cultural dimension that we arrive at the ultimate meaning of the Bildung (or Humanitas or Paideia) which GENNARI (2001,29) understands from two possible perspectives: Schöpfung (creation) and Verfertigung (manufacture). The perspective we are proposing is much closer to the Bildung understood as Schöpfung, than as Verfertigung. The idea of manufacturing leaves us a long way from conceiving of education from a cultural dimension, whereas thinking in terms of the possibility of creation is already inherent in the very conceptualization of culture. If culture is connected to the idea of hermeneutics and this invites us to think of man as being shaped by interpretation, what type of shaping can be achieved through manufacturing processes? It brings us back to the production of objectified subjects, bodies that must “be educated”, bodies that will be transformed by means of systems and mechanisms, following a given regulated positioning of bodies (such as standing in line). This kind of positioning can be an extraordinarily long way from the ideas of the Bildung that we have begun to outline (MAROÑAS, MARTÍNEZ & GRADAILLE, 2018).

The Bildung calls a consideration of elements such as history, art, creativity, a given Weltanschauung, the experience lived, temperament, a world external and internal, expression, a style, a symbol, etc. (GADAMER, 1977,32; VILLALOBOS, MÁRCELES y AYALA, 2013). These elements direct us not to a result, but to a
process, where subjectivity becomes a central element. In the light of hermeneutic pedagogy, the Bildung allows this process of recovery of the cultural dimension of learner’s bodies. In fact, it will be in a given culture that the subjects “take body”: incarnate and embody themselves. Beyond this culture, the hermeneutic of symbolised, semantically or textualised bodies would not have any meaning.

Taking a cultural perspective towards learner’s bodies offers us a hidden dimension (for the Platonic and Cartesian discourses) which some of the current discourses have attempted to recover (VILLALOBOS, 2016). It is not a question of thinking of the body (and shaping it) through revisionist or reparationalist practices, or practices of maintenance. The cultural perspective signals a new dimension, which talks to us of the symbolism of bodies. If we follow the suggestions of GARAGALZA (2002), this perspective moves from nature to culture, and this process occurs through the symbol. This means bodies in their symbolic and cultural dimension, beyond the anatomies that some teaching practices insist on continuing to impart.

The symbolism of bodies begins with the subjects own experience of his or her body and to the world that surrounds it. It enables the subject to break with the external in order to accompany the idea of the body towards an interiorized dimension. It is through this process of interiorization, and with it, symbolization, that we can talk about corporeity. Corporeity refers to the body in its Leib dimension, and allows the subject to pass from an objectified category to a subjectified category. This is the aim of all education: provide the
appropriate conditions for an internalization of a symbolic order that models his or her language, thoughts, activities and gestures (Le BRETON, 2000). However, it is in this “provision” that care must be taken not to forget what is meaningful for the subject him or herself. There is a danger that, through moralization, medicalization and mechanization, we end up forming objectified bodies and not embodied subjects.

3. THE FORMATION OF A PEDAGOGIC SUBJECT: GOING BEYOND OBJECTIFIED BODIES

If we place the training and shaping of learners somewhere between symbolization and the processes of insertion into cultural contexts, that which ultimately gives meaning to the process itself is the shaping of a pedagogic subject, in which the body will play a central role (VILLALOBOS & GANNA, 2016). This forming of the subject will have meaning if it maintains some relationship with what Touraine proposes:

Subjectivation is the aim of individuation. It takes place based on the rearticulating of instrumentality and of identity, when the individual is redefined by what he does, what he values and the social relations in which, in this way, he finds himself committed (TOURAINE, 1997: 86).

However, if the formation of the pedagogic subject forms part of our ideations (LIZARTE & FERNÁNDEZ, 2018), the creation of
the binomial (pedagogic object/pedagogic subject) has been present throughout our pedagogic culture and our culture of the body. As Cullen states: "it is a question of teaching certain bodily knowledge, organized in a particular way and evaluated in one form, and not another (...) some of the different meanings and images in relation to the body are selected. These are produced and circulated within the culture" (1997). Prior selection of images and meanings cannot lead to what we have called the pedagogic subject, because we expect the boy or girl child, the learners, etc. to behave, bodily, in a given way. In the transmission of knowledge about the body, the educator/master/teacher comes into play, and he or she does this from his or her own body. This is where we have the opportunity to participate in one of education’s paradoxes (PALLARÈS & CHIVA, 2017). While the body of the educator/master/teacher can serve to help enter into this symbolic dimension of bodies, too often it becomes the promoter of order and bodily discipline. This promotion of order remains anchored to an aspect of teaching that is often criticized: that which is meaningful, relevant and of concern for pedagogy remains the education of the mind (intellect, cognitive processes, learning, etc.). For CULLEN (1997), there is a tension created between the pedagogic-body-subject’s desire to learn, and the desires of the teacher-body-subject. If the latter has the need (and the desire) to impose his choice of bodily knowledge on the learner, then a pedagogic-body-subject will not emerge. Instead a pedagogic-body-object will be formed.
To promote the establishing of the subjective aspect, linking it to the pedagogic and to the corporal, we understand that the key to the binary construction that places us between objectivity and subjectivity is found in the relationship between power, knowledge and desire. This may, however, be mitigated by the effects that corporal problematics can create in pedagogic contexts. Corporal problematic can be approached from the point of view of resistance and connected to the Freirian critique of the banking approach to education (the subject is not a body in which we deposit information and knowledge). Those pedagogies that attempt to work with subjects that are conceived beyond their own powers, knowledge and desires will necessarily have to face the learners’ bodily ills.

Having dismantled that pedagogy which continues depositing knowledge into learner’s bodies, controlling them and denying them the possibility of their desires, we are preparing ourselves to structure another that enables the pedagogic subjects to interpret themselves and understand themselves in their entirety (GONNET, 2018). In order to reach this there is a step that must first be taken: the teacher-body-subject must abandon the role of obfuscator of the power, knowledge and desires of the learner. That is how we participate in finding a relationship based on the body-to-body touch of interacting corporeity’s. There is therefore a need for the pedagogic touch called for by Van Manen called for:
Pedagogic comprehension is always a kind of applied comprehension (...) it is carried into practice via what we can call “pedagogic touch”, (...) it is concerned with the unique and particular circumstances, (...) it is not abstract, (...) Pedagogic comprehension is, in itself, practical comprehension: a practical hermeneutic of the being and coming to be of a child in a given situation (Van MANEN, 1991: 24).

It is through touch that it becomes possible to establish the pedagogic subject. Through his or her body (the mediator between him and the community), we are placed in communion (we are communicating) with the collective. What happens, on the other hand, when the “contacts” – coming from *com* (together) and *tangere* (to touch) - are eliminated from pedagogic practice? Is it possible to have pedagogy beyond, or without touch? If it there is such a pedagogy, what kind of subject does it educate? These are questions that in hermeneutic terms remain open to interpretation, but which Cajiao’s reflections help us to define:

Now I know that I am only a body for love and solitude, and only from my body do I manage to articulate a way of thinking and feeling the world. This is maybe what has led me to feel that the body is the skin of the soul, because it is on this sensitive skin which occasionally calls for a kind gesture, an expression of tenderness or an embrace, where the deepest experiences of love, solidarity, the possibility that the internal abyss be contained in another body, or the terrible solitude of a soul that suffers heartbreak without reaching a meaning to justify its existence (CAJIAO, 1996: 11).
It is therefore through sharing these “corbal” experiences that the formation of the pedagogic-body-subject, capable of self-interpretation, has its place, situating itself in the world in an embodied way (CHIVA, PALLARÈS & GIL, 2018), and through the introspective exercise, discovering him or herself as the protagonist of his or her own project.

4. THE PEDAGOGY OF THE BODY’S NARRATIVELY

If we understand the pedagogy of the symbolic body from a performative position, whereby the construction of the personal (corporal) project comes from the production of words (AUSTIN, 1970), the need emerges to speak of a pedagogy that contemplates, as a possibility, but also as a process, the narration of the bodies themselves. In order to become aware of our presence and corporal existence we must be capable of constructing ourselves in the form of a spoken narrative, as corporatized subjects. We cannot exist beyond the presence that emanates from our face. The body, through the face, but also through our anatomy, now already symbolized, is both the frontier and the display of our subjectivity. Through the body, we enter into contact with, but at the same time, differentiate ourselves from the community. This characterization of the individual is based on a key exercise: that which the body is capable of transmitting, saying, building through its corporatized discourses.
In pedagogy of narratively, the body must be thought of in terms of experience and not as a simple object. If the body is the experience lived by the subject (embodied), the subject must be capable of corporally transmitting episodes of his or her experience trajectories. This is precisely what RICOEUR (1996) is saying when he says that understanding oneself is narrative from one extreme to the other: understanding oneself is to take ownership of one’s own life. Furthermore, in the narratives of experience itself, we outline what has been left inscribed in a certain embodied memory: the stroke of experience lived in our own skin. The proposal presented by García begins to take shape, to the extent that the body, symbol of oneself, becomes the mediator between the individual and the world that surrounds him (2000). On putting oneself in contact with this corporatized other, narratively comes into play. To explain my trajectory with the marks left by my body (COMPARADA & MORGADO, 2017), to explain to others that which I want to transmit, say, explain, and/or display about myself.

Corporal narratively allows the learner to express him or herself. This textualized corporal expression has various functions, including acting against the obligatory nature of some pedagogies of corporal normalization, anatomically corrective discipline, and the silencing of drives and desires: activating the body, instead of provoking its neutralization. The corporal narrative is precisely the opposite of corporal neutralization, maximum pedagogic expression of the prohibition of the body. In a pedagogic project that aims to offer the subjects the possibility to build their corporal project, prohibition
becomes totally out of place, above all because the central axis of the corporal architecture has shifted from the teacher-body-subject to the learner-body-subject. Beyond the Frankensteinian “manufacture” of bodies, the subjects design their own bodies, and in this same exercise of *corporal design*, we find the existence of the etymological negation of *infancy* (incapable of speaking).

If the axiom of communication that is proposed to us by Watzlawick revealed the impossibility of not communicating (*we cannot not communicate*), the child, as a subject incapable of speaking, is left absolutely corporatized, speaking through gestures, moves and movements, smells, silences and stillness. Because the pedagogy of narratively is nothing other than:

A voyage through the body, travelling through the bones, crossing tissues, body temperatures, postures that place us in contact with the rigidities, with the discomforts, and give time to the body’s work, for the body’s memory to act, giving way to the image, the scene that sleeps in the shapes, in the concavities and the convexities (KESSELMAN, 1989: 164, quoted by PEDRAZA, 1996).

The pedagogy of corporal narratives is, by definition, much closer to being an action that enables the subjects to reflect upon themselves (especially about their corporeity’s) than to being the transmission of external wisdom (where forms of *corporal beings* are displayed).
5. A pedagogy of touch and the senses

Through new technologies, but above all, through pedagogic devices, a *ritualised disappearance of the body* is taking place, this includes the gestures, postures, the distances in the subjects, their desires and their annunciation (HERAZO, VALENCIA & BENJUMEA, 2018). Through various mechanisms, these ways of doing are put in order in such a way that neither the *senses* in general, nor *touch* in particular, have a place.

On the other hand, speaking of hermeneutics and contemplating, at the same time, the symbolic dimension of bodies brings us to conceive of a pedagogy that favours and insists that part of its action is realized through touch and through the senses. We must be aware, if we draw an analytical a parallel to the presence of the body in medical contexts, that to think of the body in terms of the senses is to move away from the idea of a "body over which we intervene". Speaking of pedagogy of touch implies a position of *corporal empathy* with this other, of emotional implication. This pedagogy does not mark the distance (called *optimum distance* by some educators) between educator and learner, at which their bodies do not interact in a tactile way.

The pedagogy of touch proposes bringing the subject’s corporeity’s into play. It understands that this corporal convergence empowers the growth of the different participant subjects (PALLARÈS & CHIVA, 2018). It is a question of sharing a certain
sensoriality with the other, based on trust and proximity, and developed from mediating corporal positions.

Having arrived at this point, it is difficult for us to conceive of pedagogy without touch, where educator and learner eradicate bodily reality from their daily action, without the existence of interactions between the experiences of the subjects (LAUDADIO & MAZZITELLI, 2018). This pedagogy of touch carries with it implicit different perspectives:

- Working not from predefined positions, but from the encounter and the pedagogic relationship

- Based on the experience of both corporeity’s

- Not wanting to remove corporeity from the pedagogic terrain

- Not trying to objectify the educative processes.

If we talk about pedagogy of touch, we have to talk, from a more comprehensive point of view, of a pedagogy of the senses. Touch is one of the senses that it aims to promote, but there is a wider conception of the senses that allows Le Breton to speak of teachers of the senses and teachers of the truth (2000). The pedagogy of sense is based on the senses, empowering them to the full and attempting to enable the subject to develop his or her potential through them. The teacher of truth, as Le Breton paints him, is a teacher of laziness and
subjugation, he does not encourage search and he forces the inculcation of a system in which forms are interchangeable, as only the forms that pass through him are important (2000). So, what role do touch and the senses that give rise to the emotions play in pedagogic contexts? Can emotions blossom in the classroom?

Too often, we get a negative response to this question, through the actions of a pedagogy that continues to favour the intellectual versus that which comes from, and is expressed or is manifested through the body. This new approach is a pedagogy that teaches us to listen to the voice of the body, to know it, and to feel and act on its needs. One of the ways of doing this is awakening the sense of touch, quenched by the actions of excessively rationalist pedagogy.

6. A CULTURAL RETURN TO THE EDUCATION OF THE BODY

This pedagogy proposes a model of the body that aims to overcome perspectives, partly historicized and partly still current, which categorize the body from a negative point of view (URDANETA & VALLALOBOS, 2016). Thus, beyond the hermeneutics that understand bodies as elements to be dissolved, controlled, eliminated or subjugated, we find ourselves in a reading of the body as a space of possibility for involving the subject (ZAPATERO, GONZÁLEZ & CAMPOS, 2018). Nevertheless, while we reject the negative approach to the body, we do not want to
position ourselves in the perspective of postmodernist dualism that looks for a disembodiment of subjects, in favour of their virtualization. We are looking for a pedagogy situated in what Touraine defines as the *School of the Subject*, where the body is not a body that we have, but we ourselves are the body. We propose a pedagogy that aims to break with binary structures and, in this way, with the construction of a dualist model in which man is conceived as body and soul (PALLARÈS, TRAVER & PLANELLA, 2016). The pedagogy of corporeity is defined by a *positive* understanding of the body, rather than taking place within the cycle of *corporeal negativity*. The body is not that enemy that deprives us of reaching knowledge. In fact, we can reach knowledge through and from our experience of corporeity.

*Hermeneutics* enables the constitution of pedagogy with open curricular models (PALLARÈS & PLANELLA, 2018; VILLALOBOS, MARCELES & AYALA, 2013), resituating of the subject at the centre of the educational act. It allows the learner to educate him or herself. The projection of the idea that the subject him or herself has of his or her body, his or her bodily experiences and the uses and textures that (s) he will give it, are an implicit part of this self-education. Education does not produce *a la carte* bodies, what it does is educate bodily consciousness – the *Leib*, the embodiment - based on the idea that the educators cannot think or decide how others should live or experience their bodies. If we understand the subject as that which has the capacity to reject certain actions/demands/proposals and to affirm others, we will also understand it as that which has the
capacity to reject certain body-models (or attitudes and thoughts about the body) and to affirm others.

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