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Citation for published version:

Thorburn, M & Stolz, S 2019, 'Understanding experience better in educational contexts: The phenomenology of embodied subjectivity.', *Cambridge Journal of Education*, pp. 1-12.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2019.1632798>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1080/0305764X.2019.1632798](https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2019.1632798)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Cambridge Journal of Education

Publisher Rights Statement:

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Cambridge Journal of Education on 05/07/2019, available online: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0305764X.2019.1632798>."

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Understanding experience better in educational contexts: the phenomenology of embodied subjectivity

Abstract

We consider in this critical paper that claims that human agents experience things-in-the-world as the same are deeply flawed as these accounts misconstrue and fail to appreciate the phenomenology of embodied subjectivity. To overcome these complex problems we outline how phenomenology can reach beyond positivist and standardized approaches to classroom learning and assessment and offer a broader and more encouraging perspective. We consider that the naturalistic account of subjectivity advanced by Merleau-Ponty provides a theoretically sound basis for understanding experiences better and for embodiment to become more central to educational aims. In developing our position we detail how recognising changes in Merleau-Ponty's thinking over time are crucial for appreciating the nature of embodied subjectivity. Thereafter, we highlight and exemplify how practical approaches based on a phenomenological reduction of seeking, sensing and seeing could enhance the centrality of embodied subjectivity in contemporary education.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Embodied subjectivity, Education, Merleau-Ponty

Introduction

When it comes to notions of experience, human beings possess a naturalistic and intuitive understanding of phenomena from a first-person or subject's point of view. In a sense, when we experience X, we are mostly conscious of X because as human beings we have sophisticated sensory systems (e.g. vision) so we can experience X. How we come to experience X, or explain its content and composition is a more complex matter, and indeed a perennial issue in the philosophy of mind. With the rise of cognitive science in the 1960s, we find a new form of theorising about the mind that attempts to provide a scientific explanation of phenomena that would appear to be anti or non-naturalistic in form (e.g. information processing or computationalist-symbolic models). These accounts however have considerable difficulty in explaining how we experience X, or the phenomena. Due to the complexity of the mind-body problem, it is easy to see how in educational contexts this would also be a matter of conceptual confusion. Thus, just because we all share the same sensory apparatus, and from a first-person or subject's point of view we intuit things as they

are does not mean we experience things or even understand X in the same way. We consider that the philosophical tradition of phenomenology has much to contribute on this matter, and in many ways is best placed to explain phenomenological data, or experiences of X, and if utilised properly can bridge the gap between the subjective and objective. Indeed, Hagel (1974, p. 449) makes the strong point that phenomenology's goal is not to capture everything, but to describe in part the subjective character of experiences in a 'form comprehensible to beings incapable of having those experiences.' If anything, such a position highlights the need for phenomenology to be descriptive and analytical, and at the same time explain phenomenological data, or experiences of X in a way that can take into account the intersubjective and intercorporeal dimension of the self.

If a greater appreciation of phenomenology was prevalent in education, we consider that greater connections could be made with a plethora of national education programmes in Anglophone countries that contain an expectation that in addition to curriculum design principles being framed around progression, breadth and depth that relevance and personalisation are also included (see, for example, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2015; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2016; Scottish Government, 2008). Part of this relevance and personalisation agenda involves learners being more active and responsible for their learning and with an accompanying expectation that teachers have an enhanced remit for students' physical, social and emotional wellbeing, and not just their mental wellbeing and progress. However, as Prain et al. (2013, p. 658) note, the 'support for personalised learning has tended to remain vague about its distinctive features, representing it simply as a way to improve student motivation and learning

outcomes.’ These concerns mirror Biesta’s (2010) anxieties about the ‘learnification’ of education, where the function of teaching becomes rather muddled, and where the process of learning is championed relative to the acquisition of knowledge and wider socialisation goals. Allied to these concerns is an unease about the often over regulated nature of what counts as experiential learning in education. Seaman (2008, p. 17) highlights that the constructivist-informed sequential or cyclical approaches to experiential learning that are based on an assumed coherence between experience-reflect-learn ‘reduces the highly interactive and bodily qualities of ... experiences to secondary elements in an individual’s experience.’ Consequently, this view of experience-reflect-learn ‘might be considered an *ideology* (original emphasis retained) of experiential learning rather than a *philosophy* or *theory* (original emphasis retained) of experiential learning (Seaman, 2008, p. 18).

Moreover, Seaman (2008) is also critical of the selective use of educational theory by enthusiastic proponents of experiential learning. This has resulted in the conflation and underrepresentation of two opposing ideas, namely that championing the autonomous learner does not dovetail with arguing for the collective benefits of shared educational experiences.

Amidst these concerns the pedagogical focus for teachers becomes one of engaging with students’ experiences and reflections, and of understanding holistically how students are progressing and engaging with their learning environments. These new challenges are in many respects an acknowledgement that at least in terms of policy expectation that something greater than passive engagement with subject disciplines is planned and that teachers’ will take steps to engage with these enhanced expectations of their practice.

Furthermore, in philosophical terms, these types of developments raise questions about the nature of intersubjective and intercorporeal experiences found in educational contexts. This paper predominantly investigates these latter philosophical concerns as one of the problems with many new national education programmes is the assumption that similar educational experiences lead to similar outcomes. We argue that while some human agents may share an experience of X, it does not mean that all human agents share the same understanding of X. Thus, we consider that accounts of experience that claim that human agents experience things-in-the-world as the same misconstrue and fail to understand the phenomenology of embodied subjectivity. Moreover, students holding diverse subjective views should be considered a good thing and not a problem or a bad thing. Thus, as students engage with their environment in different ways, their subjective experiences will be different and from an educational point of view, this presents opportunities to explore the reasons why students experience matters differently.

In addition, falling foul of this false premise can lead to a host of unwarranted claims being made about educational outcomes. For example, Thorburn (2008) found when reviewing the practical experiential learning approaches advocated within high stakes examination contexts in physical education that a methodological conservatism associated with narrowly following the strictures of mind-body dualism was evident. This stifled a fuller understanding of the nature of performance and the benefits of deliberative practice in sharpening analytical enquiry. Thus, while the course rationale stridently outlined the multiple benefits of practical experiential learning, in practice, learning was often constrained by a separating out of practice and theoretical learning. This lack of integration

in learning also impacted on assessment practices where there was a preponderance of similar and often rote-based answers, and a failure to promote the distinguishing characteristics of an autobiographical writing approach framed around integrating experientially-based experiences with the acquisition of related knowledge. Thus, the lack of authenticity in the learning approaches adopted, as characterised by a lack of awareness around the nature of experience experienced by different students, further diminished the achievement of learning outcomes. This is clearly unfortunate, as we would argue from an educational point of view, that if descriptions are described well enough by the agent (e.g. in a journal) that selected writings can serve as a productive educational platform to explore differences in, for example, factors influencing performance, or how we come to understand and make-sense of things from different points of view. Furthermore, these types of questions are educational in relation to notions of subjectivity as it highlights the subjective characteristics of experience in a way that bridges the gap between the subjective and objective by rejecting the so-called privileges of first-person access.

To overtake these complex learning and related assessment problems, we argue that a greater appreciation of phenomenology and embodied subjectivity is needed. Drawing upon the writings of Merleau-Ponty and his naturalistic account of subjectivity can provide a theoretically sound basis for understanding experience better and for arguing that embodied experiences should become more central to educational aims. In this light, we detail how changes in Merleau-Ponty's thinking over time are crucial for appreciating the nature of embodied experiences and their relevance for contemporary education. Such a focus dovetails with developments in phenomenology where embodied subjectivity has emerged

as a prominent strand of research, and where elaborations about the inner processes of interactional livings between the body and consciousness have benefitted from the separating out of the animate body (*Leib*) from the inert physical body (*Körper*). The founder of phenomenology, Husserl notes that the former (*Leib*) was central to people's capacities and sense of agency. Husserl, then developed the use of intertwining as an operational concept for understanding how humans and language are interwoven, and of how re-lived memories can impact on current perceptions. In Moran's (2013) view, Husserl's notion of intertwining provides the source of the elaborations of presence and absence in Merleau-Ponty's final and unfinished work - *The Visible and the Invisible* (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968). In this text, Merleau-Ponty sought to further re-define the *Leib* viz. *Körper* difference by highlighting how intertwining could act as a conceptual device for reconsidering the body as being in permanent unity with our consciousness (Moran, 2013). Thus, Merleau-Ponty led the way in exploring in detail how the experiences and motility of the body play a crucial role in perception as well as language and speech. In this regard, Moran (2013) credits Merleau-Ponty for his farsightedness in seeing the potential for revealing how an explanation of nature and culture could be advanced through an account of being-in-the-world. Pivotal to this way of thinking is an understanding of transcendental subjectivities, particularly the way in which the nature of being-in-the-world precedes conscious thought and pre-reflective experiences. In this way, the eye and the mind can reinterpret bodily awareness through an intertwining that exhibits itself via language and speech (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968). On this basis, embodiment is part of our culture and education and not something which is a separate activity. Moreover, phenomenology can contribute to our understanding of experience and to appreciating how embodiment can

capture the complexities between the intersubjective and incorporeal nature of our experiences and the social and cultural contexts within which we live.

Merleau-Ponty and the visibility and invisibility of experience

Within phenomenology, Husserl's later writings offer a complex overview of how human capacities and habits can develop intentional practices. Merleau-Ponty shared with Husserl the belief that the object (*noema*) and the intentional act (*noesis*) are in a correlative relationship. Thus, practices at an individual and communal level can enhance the development of society and a full engagement in worldly life. It was Merleau-Ponty who in drawing upon various works by Husserl, particularly *Ideas II* (Husserl, 1952/1989) where Husserl discusses the constitution of material and animal nature and the spiritual world, who did the most to make the invisibility of experiences become more visible. Central to this habitual life and familiar world are experiences which are relatively stable and normal. However, the everyday nature of these types of experience often requires that the hidden intentionality of experiences becomes more visible. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty recognised the importance of context and background relative to Husserl whose emphasis was much more on description (Daly, 2018). That said Merleau-Ponty was initially more guarded than Husserl on whether personal evaluations could be translated into language. Thus, habits for Merleau-Ponty operated in a more sense-giving and pre-objective way rather than in intellectual and analytical ways which are rule governed by scientific laws.

Crucially, in *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty (1964/1968) tried to overcome the major ontological limitation of his earlier work, namely that the consciousness/object

distinction was insoluble. To overcome this dualism, Merleau-Ponty developed his ontology of the flesh (*chair*) as a device for understanding better the sensation of experience and the ontological connections between human beings and the world. In this regard, Merleau-Ponty was seeking a transition from something akin to a philosophy of consciousness to a philosophy of being-in-the-world (Reynolds, 2004). As such, *The Visible and the Invisible* took forward ontologically many of the ideas earlier expressed in *The Structure of Behavior* (1942/1963) and the *Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962). In the later work, Merleau-Ponty describes through a series of crossing over devices, the interweaving differences between subjective experiences and objective existence. This takes place most notably between the eye and the mind and the felt and the touched.

More recently, Tanaka (2015) has revisited Merleau-Ponty's notion of intercorporeality, as intercorporeality can highlight the importance of embodied interactions between the self and the other in the process of social understanding. These twofold social cognition benefits can happen through behaviour matching and primordial empathy, and through interactional synchrony and a sense of mutual understanding between people. Drawing upon the numerous child development examples Merleau-Ponty (1951/1964) provides, Tanaka (2015) highlights how embodied interactions and their associated intersubjective meanings are created and shared between people without being mediated by mental representations. On this basis, 'intercorporeality refers, first of all, to the reciprocity of one's own body and that of another. The other's body appears to the self not as a mere object (*Körper*) but as the living body in action (*Leib*)' (Tanaka, 2015, p. 467). What Tanaka (2015) has in mind is a discussion on intersubjectivity and the important role embodiment plays in opening up the

world. Here, Tanaka brings to our attention a perception-action loop between the self and the other, where the body is more than a mediator between the world and consciousness, and rich in meaning when understanding other's action. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty's account of intercorporeality makes it possible to understand the meanings of other's action because it is based on the fundamental aspects of how we relate to people when we engage with others in the world through vicarious experience of another e.g. through smiling together, responding to gestures and signals, and so on, rather than to do with patterns of shared thoughts which are concerned with higher cognition. Proceeding on this basis of the interaction between the self and other is preferable to trying to infer what another person might be thinking at a particular point in time from phenomenal aspects of intercorporeality. In this way, the understanding of others is aided by being in a form of expressive continuity or synchrony with their bodily behaviours, and not something which is unduly abstract (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2012). On this basis, our ability to mutually understand between the self and other arises from embodied interaction (i.e. perception-action loop) and engaging in behaviour matching and interactional synchrony experiences.

The sum of these amplifications by Merleau-Ponty and more recently theorists such as Tanaka (2015) reveals that Merleau-Ponty had moved on from his earlier writings to consider the status of the body as subject and object, rather than preferring to prioritise the subjective over the objective body. As Dillon (1997, p. 155) notes, 'an interweaving, an *elementary* (original emphasis retained) knotting ... is always prior to its' unravelling in language and thought.' This description of knotting reflects the connections Merleau-Ponty (1964/1968, p. 133) sees between 'the exploration and what it will teach me, between my

movements and what I touch (as) there must exist some relationship by principle, some kinship' which will reveal itself as an opening on to a tactile world. Through this interweaving (crisscrossing), 'of the touching and the tangible ... movements incorporate themselves into the universe they interrogate, are recorded on the same map as it' (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 133). For as Merleau-Ponty (1964/1968, p. 136) moves onto elaborate, 'it is the body and it alone, because it is a two-dimensional being, that can bring us to the things themselves, which are themselves not flat beings but beings in depth ... open to him alone ... .' In further explaining what in traditional philosophy has been undescribed and unexplained to this point, Merleau-Ponty (1964/1968) moves onto outline that the flesh is not material or spiritual, or a representation of the mind. Rather it is an element 'in the sense of a *general thing* (original emphasis retained), midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that a style of being whenever there is a fragment of being' (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968 p. 139). Thus, flesh is 'the inauguration of the *where* and *when* (original emphasis retained), the possibility and exigency for the fact; in a word: facticity, what makes the fact be a fact' (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968 p. 140). Critical to this ontological venture was an exploration of the notion of *reversibility*. Here the mind and the body, the subject and the body, the self and other are associated with each other and not separate from experience. In this regard, the self is both individual and cultural, where at one and the same time the body is both a certain kind of body (cultural) as well as containing an individual aspect to its being (O'Loughlin, 2006). Thus, what is at stake is improving understanding of the 'interdependence of subjectivity with a physical body that is simultaneously enrolled within and constitutive of social processes' (Brown et al., 2011, p. 495).

Earlier, in *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) provided examples of the nature of the body-subject and outlined holistic ways of conceiving of relations between the body and the world which avoid the over privileging of cognition and the under-representation of the body in human experiences. As Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962, p. 136) states, ‘the cognitive life of consciousness ... is subtended by an intentional arc which projects round about us our past, our future, our human setting, our physical, ideological and moral situation ...’. Thus, rather than being bound in by the dichotomies of reason/emotion and mind/body, it is pre-reflective knowledge (experiences) of the body that enables meanings to develop. Consequently, experience is not something to be understood in a dry and detached way, but rather ‘sensed’ or felt as a result of active engagement.

However, quite how the relationships between understanding basic intentions and the body takes place revolves around a complex argument i.e. that fundamentally if we are to make sense of perception, we need to recognise that understanding space in terms of skilful unreflective activity is different from cognitive-based reflective acts. In considering the case of an injured patient, Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962, pp. 103-104) distinguishes grasping (i.e. in this example taking hold of the nose) from pointing as ‘from the outset the grasping movement is magically at its completion’, whereas pointing requires some degree of thinking and reflection in order to be achievable. Therefore as Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962, p. 103) notes, ‘concrete movements and acts of grasping therefore enjoy a privileged position for which we need some form of explanation’ in ways which an intellectualist account of sense-experience cannot provide. However, while Merleau-Ponty was convinced

that phenomenology could provide multiple ways of finding meaning in the world, it is noteworthy in the Preface to *Phenomenology of Perception* that Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) begins to cast doubt on the viability of phenomenological methodologies, stating that ‘analytical reflection knows nothing of the problems of other minds’ (p. xii) as ‘reflection does not withdraw from the world towards the unity of consciousness as the world’s basis; it steps back to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire; ... it alone is consciousness of the world because it reveals that world as strange and paradoxical (p. xiii). As such, Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) concludes that ‘the most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction’ (p. xiv).

Experience and educational contexts

One criticism of phenomenology is that in application terms some of the concepts are not easy to unpack in ways which can provide methodological insights or aid reflection, particularly so for practitioners and researchers in educational contexts. For example, Husserl’s analysis of habit tends to be spread over many of his later works and rarely teased out in more applied and methodological terms. More specifically in terms of the body, Brown et al. (2011, p. 496) outlines how multiple attempts to explain experience have floundered as the ‘body defies absolute representation ... (as it is) ... to slippery, fluid, mobile and variable to be contained comfortably within any symbolic frame.’ We contend however, that this criticism is less applicable to Merleau-Ponty as *The Visible and the Invisible* provides ontological insights into the structure of being in a context where Merleau-Ponty assigns ‘a central role to the body as the subjective matrix of experience’ (O’Loughlin, 2006, p. 14). In this light, the next section of the paper considers how the

phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty could help inform an increased understanding of the centrality of lived-body experiences as part of educational aims and everyday schooling practices. For as O'Loughlin (2006, p. 14) notes, 'our bodies are nothing less than our characteristic way of being in the world ... and ... unpacking what exactly is entailed in this characteristic way is ... a major task for education.' Thus, going forward there is a need to note that the reversible process of moving and being observed moving is part of embodied and reflexive agency, where bodily activities and language interchange with each other and where there is a shared appreciation of the connectedness of our intersubjective being. This line of thinking highlights that in educational contexts, personalised learning should not be limited to private and overly autonomous learning and students exercising personal choice, but on conceiving of learning as visible and bounded by social and cultural contexts and habit based forms of conduct.

To understand experiences better it is beneficial to engage with phenomenological methods which are capable of generating a shared understandings of basic truths from which each person can reflect on their particular experiences. Typically in areas where embodied experiences are involved, forms of interpretive phenomenological analysis are used where participants' accounts of their experiences dovetail with emerging categories of data. While this can be a valuable approach in some instances, in educational contexts the potential for participants accounts to be overly descriptive relative to finding out about their deeper experiences and intentions towards learning can render these approaches rather shallow and self-contained, not to mention privileging first-person accounts that others cannot access nor have a shared understanding of. To overtake these concerns, there is a need for

methodologies which can join embodied discussions together under some form of ‘co-constitutive conditions of possibility’ (Brown et al., 2011, p. 499).

These methodological considerations matter in a vast array of general educational contexts e.g., in terms of conceptions of space and place, there is a concern notwithstanding the given that schools come with certain boundaries of space and access, that where possible the built environment should be conceived of as natural and social (Youdell & Armstrong, 2011).

This can help students to appreciate and understand concepts of the body, space and social interaction in relation to the physical environment in ways which particularly benefit the embodied experiences of those who have often previously found schools a marginalising context for personally relevant learning and for fostering social interaction due to a plethora of possible concerns - racial, gender and disability (Noriega, et al., 2013). The consideration of body, space and social interaction can apply to school compliance procedures as well, where there is a growing awareness of the benefits of school dress being of tactile comfort, not least for its supposed benefits for increasing student attainment (The Guardian, 2017).

In conceiving of how classroom learning might be re-orientated in order to enliven a richer and broader sense-laden perspective on learning, Rocha’s (2015) review of teaching centers on the recovery of the human person through a threefold focus on the interrelationships between the fidelity of being, the energies of subsistence and the bodily matter of existence. Reflecting Biesta’s (2010) learnification concerns and Merleau-Ponty’s belief that intertwining could act as a conceptual device for reconsidering the body as being in permanent unity with our consciousness, Rocha (2015) considers that phenomenology can

be the source of the rebirth of imagining how seeking, sensing and seeing underpin a phenomenological reduction geared to improving knowledge and understanding. This holistic intention is predicated on the view that a phenomenology-informed connected and realist ontology can imagine ways in which being is considered of self and shared importance, where subsistence helps sustain vitality and where existence is represented by ‘the desire to exist in a particularly concrete, embodied, perceptual and human kind of way’ (Rocha, 2015, p. 15).

Taken together, the holistic intentions to engage with being, subsistence and existence through seeking, sensing and seeing are well suited to new curriculum objectives that aim to engage more fully with broader societal themes such as sustainable living, social justice, global citizenship and health and wellbeing e.g. Scottish Government (2008). From a Heideggerian perspective, Sheppard (2016) believes that a phenomenological reduction method could be effective in meeting such holistic intentions as for Heidegger it is problematic if education creates rigid disciplinary distinctions which contain a limited account of expected meanings for intended objects or beings. On this basis, Sheppard (2016, p. 760) considers that students should be ‘encouraged to learn information without too-fully immersing in instrumental conclusions’ and moreover that ‘the tacit function of circumspection itself would have to be disrupted through a process of organized ontological questioning’ (p. 761). In this context, delimiting possibilities through phenomenological reduction is not considered a pessimistic or negative matter but rather a necessary condition for making sense of the world (Sheppard, 2016). Such efforts could reasonably be

considered as a more plausible way of supporting personalised learning relative to the vague attempts which often prevail (Prain et al, 2013).

Furthermore, this paper also reflects O'Loughlin's (1998) concern that the school curriculum continue to render the body as problematic for students and teachers alike, especially in terms of the more expressive aspects of movement. O'Loughlin (1998) recommends an enhanced profile for those aesthetically-related subjects and activities such as drama and dance which provide enhanced opportunities for emotional expression and cooperative activity. This position chimes with Stolz's (2015) contention that the bias towards psychological discourses in education has failed to provide a robust account of learning that includes the part embodiment plays in how students perceive themselves and navigate their world and interrelationships with others. Moreover, Thorburn (2008) drew upon phenomenology (particularly Merleau-Ponty) to review how perceptual experiences can help explain the part embodiment plays in enhancing a holistic and integrated view of learning. Related to this perspective, more recent work by Thorburn and Stolz (2017) has described how a contemporary dance-related example could merge practical experiential learning with shared, productive and mutually beneficial two-way conversations on poise, precision, projection, relationships, the uses of space, feeling, mood, and ideas on music, costume and lighting in order to collectively enhance meaningful learning and a shared sense of purpose. The authors argue that this example would benefit from pedagogical practices which enabled extended opportunities for students to get into the habit of exercising reflection and deliberation as these types of experiences contain the capacity to respond in dynamic rather than predetermined routinized ways. In this way, embodied habits

could become deep-rooted and resistant to other school and societal pressures which may conflict with regular engagement with embodied activity.

However, in all of this the central concern remains of how methodologically attempts to merge experiences with memory can be taken forward. In some respects compounding this problem is recognition that in educational contexts language is the predominant method used for verifying learning and thereafter where necessary of assessing learning.

Acknowledgement of this point at a practical level means that some pedagogical forethought about when reflection and recording experiences might take place is important - for example, during activity, directly following activity, after a gap of some determinate amount of time. The greater point, however, is consideration of the focus of students' memories and reflections on experience. This raises questions about the extent to which students are advised to focus on the process or content of their experiences. In relation to our central concern that too often undue assumptions are made about shared educational experiences leading to similar outcomes, we believe that rather than searching for common themes that analysis should begin with descriptions of experiences which only then become the basis for considering how 'wildly diverse sets of conditions and subsequent experiences might communicate (or not) with each other' (Brown et al., 2011, p. 510). Building on this intention, for greater specificity in methodological progress, Brown et al., (2011) advises that a focus on identifiable occasions or events helps in defining the focus of reflection and provides the basis for more extended and nuanced description. Furthermore, considering that bodies and spaces are relationally defined helps shape the limits of experiences being focussed on. Thus, with regard to Thorburn and Stolz's (2017) earlier example of how

shared conversations on dance related matters might be taken forward with a shared sense of purpose, we do not doubt the pedagogical complexities of making coherent progress on these matters given the constraints many teachers work under. That said we see the benefits of a pedagogical focus which helps students and teachers alike to understand that experiences in education are relational, emergent and subtly different. In this way, learning experiences should not be assumed to be similar in outcomes just because learning experiences were similar in nature.

Conclusion

This critical paper has challenged some of the flawed assumptions made about shared experiences leading to similar outcomes in education. In addressing these complex concerns, we have drawn upon aspects of phenomenology, most notably some of the later writings of Merleau-Ponty as the foundation for providing a theoretically sound basis for understanding embodied experiences, and thereafter for explaining how phenomenological data can if utilised properly bridge the gap between the subjective and objective. In outlining our position further, we map out how interactions between the self and other can best be considered as being largely a perceptual matter in many everyday circumstances. Furthermore, through noting concerns that the school curriculum continues to render the body as problematic for students and teachers alike, especially in terms of the more expressive aspects of movement, we provide some general and subject specific educational-related applications of Merleau-Ponty's theorising. These exemplifications benefit from recent thinking from Rocha (2015) on how practical approaches informed by a

phenomenological reduction of seeking, sensing and seeing could enhance the centrality of embodied subjectivity in contemporary education.

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