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Embodied-artistic Pedagogy: Creating Hopeful Educational Transitions for Student Teachers in Times and Places of Crises and Trauma

1. Introduction: Fields of Hope

“Shall I take the next left coming up?” I asked Charlotte, my co-researcher and navigator on our field research trip in the province of the Western Cape’s interior, the Swartland. We had just concluded a strategic meeting which another of our research partners¹, Fabian Hartzenberg from the Peter Clarke Arts Centre, had facilitated with a senior advisor in the Western Cape Education Department and were heading back to the city. Our discussion came at the end of yet another in-service/Professional Teacher Development programme undertaken at a local high school in the bustling, rural town of Malmesbury². At this stage of our journey along country back roads we had whizzed by large wheat farms, with bright open skies, some 70kms outside of Cape Town. Cool Atlantic Sea breezes wash this part of the land that is often parched and windblown. “Such idyllic fresh air,” Charlotte said lifting her head briefly from Google Maps App and her mobile.

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1 The research team of first the school project (2017–2020) and then the teacher education project since 2021 consisted of Gerard M. Samuel, University of Cape Town’s School of Dance, Charlotte Svendler Nielsen, University of Copenhagen, Liesl Hartman, first the Peter Clarke Arts Centre in Cape Town and from 2019 the Zeitz MOCAA Museum in Cape Town and Fabian Hartzenberg, the Peter Clarke Arts Centre in Cape Town.

2 This school was chosen by the Western Cape Education Department as a focus school for the arts post-apartheid. The area is characterised by being a Coloured farming community, showing huge inequalities amongst the people as the majority are living lives in poverty.

“Pity the wind turbines ... but I guess we need them given our energy crisis,”³ I quipped. Charlotte responded: “It’s everywhere ... in Europe too now with the complications of the war in Ukraine” (she sighed deeply). “Hopefields!” Charlotte exclaimed as a signpost indicated a tiny village. “How ironic,” I smiled. We decided this was the perfect place to stop, parked the car in front of the Bees Café, the café of a bee farm that also served as the village shop for handicraft souvenirs from the area. We decided to sit at a table in front of the café looking on the road and the village’s Dutch colonial style white church. We both wondered how quiet it was in Hopefields on a Saturday afternoon. While having our coffee and carrot cake we reflected on our encounter this morning and how it had propelled us into thinking about a further round of engagement with embodied-artistic pedagogies. It was reassuring to find ourselves in such a highly receptive space. All agreed that more teachers engaging with the arts in systematic ways would be a cornerstone to the success and strengthening of arts in schools’ curricula and our specific work of integrating arts also as ways of working through the arts. We felt emboldened by their commitment and agreed that even more careful work and strategies to support teachers (and learners) would have to be investigated to be deployed and advance learning experiences of children also in these rural classrooms. And, that more work must be done. We agreed that it’s ‘Fields of Hope’ we need if we are to tackle our challenges. Working with the arts might be one approach to create such fields or spaces in educational settings. (Gerard M. Samuel, co-researcher)

2. Exploring ‘Fields of Hope’ Through Arts-based Inquiry, Participatory Research, and Hermeneutic Phenomenological Reflection

The focus of this article lies in the intersection of ideas of arts-, peace- and teacher education. It questions the relationship between arts education and peace education, and asks what might be crucial in a pedagogy of arts to foster experiences of importance to peace in a community? To cast light on these questions we discuss the outcome of a hermeneutic phenomenological analysis (van Manen, 1990) of our work with students of Pre-Service Teacher Education in Dance that evinces experiences of peace.

During 2017–2020 we were an intercultural group of artist/researcher/teachers (a/r/tographers (Irwin, 2004)) from different institutions in South Africa and Denmark that for the four years worked with the same school class in Cape Town in intensive workshop weeks twice a year aiming at developing an embodied-artistic pedagogy.

³ South Africans across the country have been experiencing unprecedented levels of instability in energy supply for over 5 years. This has resulted in power/electricity outages that can last up to 4 x 2,5 hours in a day. Energy supply is problematically housed in one service provider with infrastructural and governance systems that are failing. The knock-on effect results in major stresses in education, health, and tourism sectors.

The group created a workshop format in the cross-over between dance and visual arts. This article reports a hermeneutic phenomenological analysis (van Manen, 1990) of material from an extended enquiry which included workshops with postgraduate teaching focused university students in South Africa during 2023.

In our work – both in the educational approach of the workshops and the research methodology – philosophically we have a phenomenological standpoint (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). This is because the idea that as human beings we are always physically intertwined with each other and the surrounding world, resonates with the research questions that we explore. For example, what does it mean for educational processes to take embodiment into account? From a phenomenological perspective the physical dimension is also interconnected with the psychological dimension of living. Therefore, to have an experience in an educational space such as classrooms and at universities with others always happens as inter-personal processes.

By use of a research methodology combining arts-based inquiry (Jones & Leavy, 2014), participatory research (Reason & Bradbury, 2008) and hermeneutic phenomenological reflection (van Manen, 1990) we have attempted to capture experiences of participants as they were directly involved in creating the empirical material for analysis. Creative expression formats (text and drawings) also contributed to exploring what is specific about the educational space being created in the workshops. Through a hermeneutic phenomenological approach of analysis (van Manen, 1990) we can create deeper understandings of what meaning the students make of experienced phenomena and we can make visible what themes turn out to be central for experiences in the space that we create. Van Manen (1990, p. 7) highlights that descriptions of “significant moments” are central to understanding human experience and lived meanings. Descriptions of such moments “may provide opportunities for reflecting pedagogically on actions, situations, and relations of teaching” (van Manen, 1990, p. 54). The process of selecting, analysing and interpreting such moments is a three-step process as described by Max van Manen (1990, pp. 92–95). It starts by a first “holistic reading” of all the texts produced by the students about experiences which they have characterised as “significant moments” to determine what are overall themes of importance to them. The next step is a “selected reading” of extracts that we marked in the first reading, here we gave them headings to help organising the texts in different categories. The third reading process is a “detailed reading” of the extracts to determine what are sub-themes or qualities we get insights to in relation to the overall categories. Finally, short interpreting texts about the sub-themes are written in relation to the extracts. Van Manen (1990, p. 74) describes what we might call a fourth step which he terms “consulting phenomenological literature.” This research process is an abductive process in which theory and concepts from literature are not guiding the reading, but adding to the reading in discussion with what we found through the analysis to help understand more about the themes that were found. Hence, we are not presenting a framework of peace education concepts at the outset, but use concepts from this field

of study to discuss what we found in the analysis that we might understand better when adding this lens.

Our research might also be said to lie within a framework of (post)qualitative inquiry (Le Grange, 2018) as it reveals how a valuing of the positionality of our participants and ourselves in this new phase of our project can add to a deeper reflexive knowledge, and to understand what was the context that we had to consider, for example when asking university students to come to campus during a period of strong student protest movements. Moreover, it can help to critically cast light on: 1) why we have come to develop this approach to teaching, 2) what constrains and/or liberates us in our engagement with the Dance curriculum in the CAPS document⁴, and 3) how we navigate the intersection of our work in the Arts, and in Dance Education Studies in particular with other subject specific areas.

Prior to the workshops with the UCT students upon being informed of the purpose of our project, how data would be handled and stored, and of their right to withdraw from the project at any given time until articles had been published, students had readily agreed to participate in the activities and had granted us their written permission slips. As the situation in South Africa around the start of the academic year of UCT in February 2023, was one of rising tension due to students' protests there was a need to ask ourselves also more specific ethical questions. To start with, we questioned whether we would even be able to do anything with students this week as we were not sure if it was going to be safe. Twice we cancelled the planned workshop and once the situation eased a bit and we thought we would be able to do it, we started considering which room we should choose for it. This was important so that the students would not be exposed for people on campus to see that they had come for a teaching activity when there were student protests led by the student unions and asking students not to go to lectures. Could we ethically carry on? And if so, could or should we perhaps move to a different place? For example, to the Zeitz MOCAA museum in the city centre that we had previously worked at for part of the school project? We also considered how important our workshops were for the students – would we be letting them down, if we cancelled? The turning point for deciding to cancel the first two attempts was when we heard that people walking on campus were harassed by other students. Only when this situation eased did we decide to start.

⁴ “The National Curriculum and Assessment Statement” (CAPS) document is the official foundational guideline of teachers outlining curriculum objectives at each grade and for each subject learning area. Outcomes are clearly stipulated e.g. in the Arts and Culture frame where Dance Studies and Creative Arts would be located.

3. Quest for an Embodied Understanding of Peace as 'Relational Peace'

Peace for some means the absence of war (Hunter & Cohen, 2019). Peace can also mean “the sense of harmony and the absence of tension and conflict on the individual, micro level, and peace in the sense of the absence of war, armed conflict, or violence, on the collective, macro level” (Salomon & Nevo, 1999, p. 6 in Gur-Ze'ev, 2001, p. 321). In the context of South Africa rivalry/attacks between gangs could be seen as ‘wars’ that need to stop for peace to prevail. According to Ilan Gur-Ze'ev (2001) peace education as a field of research focuses on peace amongst nations by means of democratic principles to further social progress and global stability by enhancing mutual understanding. The focus of peace education research can, however, also be “violence reduction in schools” (Özsoy, 2014). Hans Ulrich Wintch (1971 in Friesen & Wieler, 1988, p. 51) stresses the inevitability of social conflict and suggests that peace education is “learning to live with conflict in a constructive manner” just as we in our earlier work have suggested that learning to live with trauma might be key in understanding resilience (Svendler Nielsen et al., 2021a). “Personal fulfilment is essential for world peace,” or in Lyman Ross’s words, “the individual must be helped to develop his full potential for constructive, peaceful living” (Gur-Ze'ev, 2001, p. 323). Gur-Ze'ev (2001, p. 318) criticises a “lack of socially oriented philosophical elaboration of peace education.” We have found that a social-ecological approach to understanding resilience (Svendler Nielsen et al., 2021a) and a relational aesthetic perspective promoting the idea of “microtopia” (Svendler Nielsen et al., 2021b) useful for co-creating knowledge with learners and teachers about the value of embodied-artistic processes in education of the multi-cultural classroom – also noting that not only ‘diversity’ but acknowledging ‘difference’ is key (Anttila et al., 2019). This corresponds with Gur-Ze'ev (2001, p. 319) noting that “the very possibility of a postmodern dialogue among differences and of border crossing overcoming ethnocentrism is ultimately founded on modern universalistic conceptions of the good.” Gur-Ze'ev (2001, p. 322) offers Wintch’s broader paradigm for peace as noted above as a way of understanding ‘counter education’, an idea that we will frame in relation to the concepts of openness and vulnerability (Todres, 2007).

Les Todres (2007) who is a phenomenologically inspired psychologist describes how a space of openness is a “soulful space” (ibid., p. 152). Previously we have shown how an artistic-educational environment that gives room for expression, creativity and imagination can be a space both of openness and vulnerability (Svendler Nielsen et al., 2020). For anything to change for anyone, there needs to be an openness between those involved and even with the surroundings, this openness is what Todres (2007, p. 152) calls the “soulful space.” Todres is not concerned with the soul in a spiritual or religious way, but with the ‘soulful’ used as an adjective meaning “full of sentiment or emotion, ‘evoking deep feeling, and ‘not mechanical or heartless” (Todres, 2007,

p. 152) with reference to different dictionaries. ‘Soulful space’ refers to a “‘spaciousness’ that can tolerate or embody the vulnerability of ‘soulfulness’” (Todres, 2007, p. 152). Todres emphasises that spaciousness is an experiential quality characterised by embracing of vulnerability as a foundation for connecting with others in empathic ways, connections which also can foster new understanding of ourselves. As such ‘soulful spaces’ might end up becoming ‘hopeful spaces’ in times and places of conflict, as experiences of this sort might bring people closer in their understanding of each other. Hence, we might have to start peace education at classroom level and find ways for learners to feel good both at an embodied level and to foster what we could call ‘relational peace’ at the outset. Todres (2007, pp. 162–163) does not use this specific term, but puts forward the idea that ‘soulful space’ takes its essence in human participation and historical relationality. Intimately within this sojourn, there is a mixing of what one goes through alone and with others, the stretching of the seasons, and the specific vulnerabilities that are more complex than a serenity of vastness. Rather, this is the taste of belonging between sky and earth, the ‘we-feeling’ of mutual vulnerability.

4. The Context of Workshops with Student Teachers in South Africa

At the time of the trip to Malmesbury in February 2023 we were at the start of the academic year for universities in South Africa. For many of the 26 universities in South Africa this period during many years has felt like an unruly turn on the rollercoaster that is the annual renegotiation of student admission, a scramble for limited student housing followed by students protesting senior management. This battleground ensues in a ‘field of hope’ where calls for ‘free education’ echoes Mandela and many other ‘stalwarts’ (loyalists) of ‘the struggle’⁵. Sadly, for many South African (and foreign African students) they begin this time with an instability that is not limited to financial constraints, but even greater deficits including adequate accommodation, food security and support for student-related health and wellness issues. To be fair, this is not uncommon terrain in many parts of the world, but is highlighted here to vividly situate our analysis of a pedagogy and its relationship to peace education. We began by examining this with a small group of student teachers of Dance at the University of Cape Town in 2021 and with different groups through to 2025. As noted previously the work extends our 2017–2020 primary school project in Cape Town which among others suggested that the valuing of an embodied perspective is significant not only for the learners, but also for teachers who are collectively with them in ‘fields of hope’. Hence, our idea was that students working to become teachers would also benefit from learning about this perspective in a workshop format.

⁵ The term ‘struggle’ is widely used in the context of the Anti-Apartheid Movement whose rallying cry was ‘Amandla!’ (power in isiZulu) and whose response from the masses was ‘Awethu!’ ([to] the people in isiZulu).

The start of the academic year at the University of Cape Town saw a further limit on the resources that our students could expect as the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) included a new mandate – the ‘N+1 rule’ (viz. a reduction in the number of years in which an academic programme must be completed) and which can still be legible for support. A 4-year BA degree that was funded for up to 6 years had shrunk to 5 years. Whilst this time frame may seem a luxury to some, the larger education environment characterised by inadequate schooling and below par preparation for academic life at university in many schools⁶ coupled with a rampant societal inequity result in an impoverishment in educational and impairment in societal mobility for large numbers of Black and Coloured students. In practice this means that the students often must work long hours doing jobs that only pay small salaries and in the time they have left in the day, they have to work harder on their academic tasks than the average student in many other countries to reach a satisfactory level for a university degree. The matter is complex and must be taken into consideration in any analysis of student responses to the kinds of interactions which we were having with the participants in our research project. It is also important to note that South Africa is one of the most unequal societies on the planet (Allais, Cooper & Shalem, 2019) and most people live in some level of traumatic experiences daily due to the consequences of crime pertinent to a society that struggles to implement and hold accountable those responsible for dividing the existing resources more equally amongst people. Experiencing threats themselves and hearing about friends’ experiences of being threatened, robbed, and violated mean that for example just walking from the university’s shuttle bus stop to the lecture halls of UCT can be a situation of risk which makes some students carry pepper sprays in their pockets. This may be a picture unknown to students in many other parts of the world. South Africa is not in war with another country, but there are wars between gangs in the township areas of the cities and people in the country have for a long while been under stress due to lack of resources like water, electricity, and money for most people.

⁶ The legacies of colonialism and apartheid in the Education sector (schools and universities) in South Africa largely remain and are rooted in oppressive systems like Bantu Education, and Group Areas and Separate Amenities Acts (of the 1950s). These material conditions linger in many Black township schools even today where pupils can receive poor preparation towards academic lives at colleges and universities that can be linked to poor infrastructure, underqualified and limited supply of teachers and teaching resources, safety concerns in rabid school grounds, and dysfunctional feeding schemes for vulnerable learners. There is also an ever-widening knowledge (often via the gradually more available social media flow) of ‘how the other-half-lives’, in privilege.

5. Experiences from Workshops Focused on Embodiment and Arts-integration with UCT Student Teachers in Dance

Since 2021 the research team has been working on how the outcomes of the school project which we led during 2017–2020 can be scaled by becoming a part of the education of teachers both in South Africa and in other countries. The workshops in 2023 described in the beginning of this article involved the participants trying and reflecting on activities from the school project and finding ways to apply these ideas in their own professional development.

Gerard led the first session of our 2023 workshops in mid-February before Charlotte arrived from Denmark. The session was effectively the very first day of the new academic year at UCT. Together we had devised a lesson plan that included an introduction to the notion of arts-integration which was to be explored initially as a theoretical position, or approach followed by an embodied way of grasping these ideas. Some of the issues Gerard raised during the session included: 1) what is Arts integration (the focus of their course for this semester⁷)? 2) what does it mean to learn a subject like History or English through Dance? 3) what could he share that had worked for him as a dance academic and in different teaching environments with over more than 35 years of teaching experience? This introductory class Gerard led in a conventional lecture room, but quickly he disrupted the classroom conventions by placing a small desk and chair as the figure of Table Mountain (the iconographic landmark of Cape Town) in the centre of the classroom. “How could we begin to teach this geographic and social phenomenon from the vantage point of the Arts, and especially from Dance?”, was his opening challenge.

In the beginning in order to explore what is embodiment Gerard formed a loose circle, allowing students to intertwine their arms at the elbows. Next, in pairs they created wider circles and finally composed a large intersecting circle used to unpacking concepts such as ‘shared’, ‘overlapping’, and ‘intertwined’. Finally, as they untangled themselves there was unanimous agreement that the process of such embodied experimentation provided a different way of knowing to the more familiar meaning making processes. Many children are traditionally taught abstract concepts like ‘intersection’ through viewing a chart composed of three intersecting circles. Sometimes, they are shown a traffic intersection where cars meet (and sometimes collide). We discussed the very recognisable image of traffic intersection and how the concept of relationships and more abstract concepts like proximity and distant could be experienced in creative play and movement, in and through the body.

⁷ The workshops formed part of a larger whole year course focused on developing academic, research and teaching skills which is led and taught by other colleagues.

In a similar exploratory vein, Gerard proposed the group considered how an English language teacher might use the body as the primary means to discover and retain the complex grammatical form of prepositions for children. Given the location in Cape Town, under, around and in(side) Table Mountain quickly became their offering. Borrowing a small light-weight table, they set up the mountain in the centre of the room and had soon completed the task of generating and demonstrating at least three prepositions in relation to the table/mountain. Students scrambled underneath the table-top = in, sat alongside and on top of the table. Again, they agreed afterwards that other common prepositions such as for Table Mountain and from Table Mountain were more complex and would need more time to unpack by teachers and thus learners/children. One idea was that the mountain offers the type of flower called fynbos that can make rooibos tea.

The second class of the week we led together. We chose the theme of 'patterns and pathways' first explored with the children at the school in 2019. We started the workshop by exploring ideas of patterns and pathways in movement and afterwards asked the students to think about what are some of the subtle and/or ingrained patterns in our lives? How does our gesture signal cultural specificities? Alongside this theme we also introduced the common dance/choreography and visual arts tools of copy – complement – contrast. We began with a warm-up that included both warming up in physical, psychological, social, and conceptual senses as we included the concepts that were the focus of the session. We stood in a circle and took turns in coming up with a movement that the others then copied. We also did complementing and contrasting each person's movements. After having done these exercises as a group we split into pairs and repeated the same ideas. We then opened up towards an orientation to our space, in this case a dance studio that was longer than it was wide and invited the students to select any three moves they had tried while standing in the circle formation. They were to make their own phrase consisting of these movements and doing them repeatedly in a specific pathway using combinations of straight, curved and zig zag that they chose. They chose to do their phrases in a specific space which either could be in the studio or outside on the stairs and pavement. Once they had got to know their own phrases they came together in their pairs and now began by copying person A and then B leading. Later they complemented each other and finally, they were asked to offer a contrasting response to the shapes being made by the moving bodies. The next part introduced working with 'space' as an element of movement (Laban, 1963): low – medium –high (floor, standing, jumping in the air) and with 'time' as another element of movement from slow to fast. At this point we introduced music although it was only possible to play the music of Gerard's phone as a loadshedding period had started. Each pair with the music had to continue moving with their phrases thinking about the elements of 'space' and 'time' and now also in dialogue with another pair across the room. This last movement part focused on being in dialogue, in flow, using no words, and listening from the body.

As we sat down Charlotte explained some of our earlier work with the intersection of two disciplines, Dance and Visual Arts and where notions of 'patterns' and 'pathways' were first articulated. She invited a re-think of the social and habitual patterns that may exist in our bodies and how we can link this theme to other subject areas: Life skills, Social science, Geography. Also, the notion of 'pathway' was given some thought resulting in students reflecting on their own professional pathways of becoming teachers. As Charlotte led the discussion Gerard lay big sheets of white paper and pens of different colour on the floor. We finished the session by inviting the students to choose a paper and we then did a series of exercises to recall the movement patterns and pathways they had experienced during the session. They drew the pathways they had been moving in and chose abstract forms to express their sensations of doing those movements through drawing and finally we asked them to write about a "significant moment" (van Manen, 1990) of the session and how it had made them feel.

Some of the students' responses to what they experienced as a 'significant moment' in the classes included:

Noluthando⁸ wrote in note form: "Creating shapes using our bodies, filling in the gaps with range of shapes, levels, and trust. Copying your partner." And she reflected that the exercise helped "build a relationship of trust," it "puts you out (of) your comfort zone" and "teaches you how to move as one." Her experience highlights an experience of empathy to move as (and with) one (another) and illustrates how the basis of our embodied-artistic pedagogy helps in developing trust. It comes across that this starts in the body.

Kuhle shared that: "My highlight was when we had to build on the words of our personal posters" (she drew an arrowhead in both directions ... ↔), "and collaborate in pairs. Coming up with a phrase of 3 movements, ↔ Making use of the 3 words. The idea was to be moving into the next phrase including transitions." And this was a 'significant moment' because "we had to be aware in the space because there were other groups moving along the space, simultaneously." In her remark we can see how an awareness in space of 'the other' became part of the experience of sharing space. It has to do with trust and empathy and this all happens as communication between bodies. We see signs in the reflections that the embodied-artistic pedagogy fosters an attitude of acceptance, selflessness, and sharing in subtle and embodied ways.

Funeka wrote that a 'significant moment' to her was, "When we were using our 3 words and having to come up with movement, kinesthetic thinking was happen(ing) to me without realising and I felt I was learning. I could experience something joyfully and it becomes meaningful to me because I was enjoying myself." Her words show us that this approach fosters moments of joy.

⁸ Students' real names are not used in order to respect their privacy. It may be noteworthy that the pseudonyms are deliberately chosen to signal the demography in the class.

A 'significant moment' for Lihle was, "At the start of the lesson when we were taking turns as body A and body B having to follow the other person's moves." And she explained that this was special as, "We might all be dancers, but our bodies move differently. It was interesting merely because I wasn't sure if I am going to be able to do the other person's moves." And she added, "Different backgrounds create different dances." The exercises she chose as what stood out the most for her in the class was about having to follow, to read 'the other' and try to 'be' the other for a while. An exercise that we understand helped to foster kinaesthetic empathy,⁹ awareness of differences and where difference is a strength, not an obstacle.

Thandile shared that a 'significant moment' for her was in the group choreographic exercise as she wrote, "I appreciate today's class, especially for someone who was once a child and having to think like one. The reflections and my memories of how I felt when I was a child. In our group choreography my group and I played a game that I used to love when I was a child and it brought so much joy. I think even being able to do it or my body remembering brought so much joy. The moment of allowing myself to play." And she further noted that, "It felt really great to not be myself and to not think about being Thandile the now and just be Thandile when I was 5–6–10 years. Will definitely take this exercise with me and teach it to my students." The exercises show to have allowed her to enter an experience of being in another time/space. Thandile's experience was similar to Funeka's as it was also one of joy and of feeling safe (like a child). Perhaps that is why the child memories appear?

Katelyn shared that, "The moment that stood out to me was the 'pathways' activity where we were asked to walk in lines across the room." And she reflects that, "I liked it because it felt – and I felt – comfortable and familiar." She experienced moments of comfort and (the) familiar from which she could start to explore. This experience, like some of the others, also shows us something about trust and feeling safe and that the exercises are touching something that is embodied/part of earlier experiences.

Noluthando's comment "(our exercises) teaches you to move as one" evinces an experience of empathy – moving as one and with one another. In the remark by Lihle we can see how an awareness in space of the other becomes part of the experience of sharing space. Several students' comments reaffirmed their experiences as children. What we can also see from these accounts is how such new, and what we discuss as hopeful experiences, can nurture a sense of accomplishment, and build self-esteem. Their reflections reveal how the experiences made them feel comfortable and free to explore. The spaciousness which this pedagogical approach made room for unleashed a confidence in which they clearly reveled.

⁹ Elsewhere (Svendler Nielsen et al., 2021a) we have unfolded the concept of "kinaesthetic empathy" with reference to Finnish dance scholar Jaana Parviainen (2002).

6. Discussion of the Role of Embodied-artistic Pedagogy in Building Peace

In this project the approach we have developed for teaching starts from experiencing, exploring, and ‘playing with’ different concepts and it is based in different pedagogical theories such as critical pedagogy (Apple, 2013), engaged pedagogy (hooks, 2014) and embodied and experiential learning (Bainbridge Cohen, 1993; Dewey, 1916/1997). It is the children’s or students’ choice how to respond (they can also choose not to do much if something is too overwhelming). The pedagogy that we have developed has a strong focus on embodied sensitivity and the teaching environment that is created through these processes at the same time nurtures sensitivity in the relationships among all those involved. What we have observed suggests that the basis of “counter education” (Gur-Ze’ev, 2001) based in openness and vulnerability can be found in developing trust which is a fundamental in most education endeavours, and that this starts in one’s own body and develops in relation to other bodies creating the ground for what we might call ‘relational peace’. We have seen through both learners’, teachers’, and student teachers’ responses during the years of our project that the creative process helps release tension, helps us breathe and feel grounded, among others because it gives possibilities to be in ‘another world’ for a while (Samuel & Svendler Nielsen, 2022). But further questions arise of how to speak of hope, or resilience in deeply traumatic contexts of wars such as in Ukraine – Russia, in Israel-Palestine, in Sudan and many other spaces? In line with Gur-Ze’ev (2001) who emphasises ‘living with’ conflict, resilience then can also be more about ‘living with’ a trauma than overcoming the trauma (Svendler Nielsen et al., 2021a).

In the workshops with students, it has become clear that feeling good in one’s own body and experiencing trust in the group is promoted in an environment focusing on arts-integration as a method. This is because tension is released when being engaged in a creative process and empathy is fostered through processes of exploring, performing and watching and finally on reflecting on others’ performances. Focusing on embodied sensitivity may play a part in helping people to live better lives in times of crises/or in lives characterised by trauma. To foster resilience in South Africa as examined by Elmién Truter et al. (2016) and Adriaan van Breda (2013), highlights our concern that there is a lack of consideration of the role that embodiment plays in processes such as peace building and hope. Crossing borders like Gur-Ze’ev (2001) pleas for, in this case borders of disciplines like teaching and research, might be important considering future perspectives of (arts) education. Crossing these borders, we can observe, fosters a strong focus on reflection through different means in the workshops which helps the participants better understand their own experiences and also the others’ perspectives.

Building trust was in focus of the workshops and the hermeneutic phenomenological analysis of students’ chosen “significant moments” (van Manen, 1990) has shown that

themes relevant for discussing peace became evident in their descriptions. However, finding possible strategies to help achieving 'relational peace' was not the goal at the outset of our work, but has become a side-effect that we have observed of the processes necessary for trust building to happen. Reading into peace education literature we found Gur-Ze'ev's (2001) notion of "counter education" a help to better understand what was happening. If we turn to critical pedagogy, for example Michel Apple (2013), he characterises an educational environment which might be able to help change society bottom-up as giving room for "love, care and solidarity" (Apple, 2013, p. 11). We are not claiming that we can solve the world's problems through arts education, but we are seeing that it may play a part in helping us to live better lives in times of crises/or in lives characterised by trauma. Looking into the literature of peace education there is a lack of consideration for the role embodiment plays for such processes. Based on our work we see the phenomenological concept of "soulful space" (Todres, 2007) being of value to understand what can happen in arts education in relation to peace building within and amongst people in a group.

7. Tying the Ends and Opening Further Perspectives

Inherent in arts education (although not in all arts education) is learning about different ideas, feelings, and experiences. There is never just one truth which is also the type of education that Gur-Ze'ev (2001, p.323) pleads for as he mentions that peace education must not only "emphasise diversity", it must also celebrate difference. It is key not to consider differences of for example cultural experiences or bodily ability as obstacles but as valuable (Anttila et al., 2019) – at the end of the day "understanding multiple versions is the beginning of learning how to weave a global multicultural peace tapestry rich in many colours, textures, and styles" (Rennebohm-Franz, 1996, p. 266 in Gur-Ze'ev, 2001, p. 323).

Gur-Ze'ev (2001, p. 321) notes that in 1998 the UNESCO declaration on the World Day of Teachers highlighted that teachers are "peace builders who shape the future within a positivistic conflict resolution orientation," but he asks whether teachers really have that function, or if they are actually working against world peace by helping to promote certain truths and not always including different perspectives on an issue. Here we could add that it is always important to consider whose truth and who is 'the other' in such practices. We also note in the UNESCO declaration from 1998, that teachers "transmit the knowledge, values, and attitudes (...)" (Gur-Ze'ev, 2001, p. 322) which may suggest an educational process that takes place as a one-way communication act. Since 1998 both the contents and the form of teaching in many places have changed towards more diversity-conscious and inclusive contents and dialogic methods evinced by for example Christopher Boyle and colleagues (Boyle et al., 2020). However, UNESCO's concept note for discussion at its conference to celebrate the

World Day of Teachers on 5 October 2023¹⁰ focused on the lack of teachers worldwide and how the teaching profession might become reinvigorated and motivating. What if UNESCO were questioning who other than those educated in the teaching profession might be employed to carry out educational activities with children in schools? What if all schools could hire a team of artists? They would not teach subject areas in the way teachers do for obtaining learning goals set in curricula but these ‘co-teacher-artists’ could be teaching for greater sensuous experiences and understanding of feelings such as empathy.

It is exemplified in our workshops that arts-integration gives possibilities for multi-modal processes. What we have seen is that all three target groups of our research: the child, the student and the teacher in artistic-pedagogical processes embody the multiple roles as creator, performer, and spectator. For the student teachers they are creating new lesson plans, executing bold ideas, and later performing these in their classrooms and with their children/learners. As they watch the children unpack these lessons both the teacher and child are in spaces of trust and vulnerability which they need to embrace for a rich exchange to occur. All these micro choices help to create an environment that gives rise to hopeful experiences. Finally, we are reminded that to enter a Field of Hope is processual, unpredictable, potentially traumatic, but also celebratory.

We learn in community and perhaps that insight is what is missing to promote peace education? “How can we build intersecting pathways and connecting points?” Gerard mused. “Yes, meeting each other – but through a focus on the strengths of our differences,” Charlotte replied.

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¹⁰ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pfo000386808>

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