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Embodied Discourse: Using Tableau to Explore Preservice Teachers' Reflections and Activist Stances

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Abstract

In the context of an arts-integration course in an elementary education program, preservice teachers used tableaux (i.e. frozen scenes) to portray field experience moments in two ways: (1) as remembered events, and (2) as projected possibilities. Using video and photographs of the tableaux, we traced the students' enactment of activist stances and analyzed their positions within dramatic frames. Specifically we focused on the affordances of drama to the practice of reflecting and we also explored the use of tableau as a conduit for researchers' provocation of additional meaning through examinations from various multimodal approaches.

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In teacher education programs across the United States, reflecting on practice is considered integral to the process of becoming an effective teacher (Howard & Aleman, 2008). Preservice teachers' reflections are often captured through private journals (Bain, Ballantyne, Packer, & Mills, 1999), dialogue journals (Garmon, 2001), or blogs (Yang, 2009). These formats offer particular affordances based on embedded literacy practices (Perry 2012; Purcell-Gates, Perry, & Briseno, 2011). For example, when submitting a journal entry, preservice teachers must possess knowledge of genre, as well as knowledge of encoded print in order to express themselves through expanded thought. Preservice teachers can also use dialogue journals to communicate with their field supervisors and engage in cyclical written interactions for dialogic purposes (e.g., Bayat, 2010; Freese, 2006). Blogs are written reflections distributed across digital spaces creating opportunities for immediate reading, response, and viral distribution (e.g., Ruan & Beach, 2005). Regardless of the medium, these text-based literacy practices mediate reflection in particular, text-based ways. Our concern, as literacy teacher educators, is that print-based modes of practitioner reflection provide print-based insight into teacher decision-making; however, teacher decision-making requires embodied acts.

Embodiment is the experience of being in the world and being of the world; and it is through the body that we understand the world. According to Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty & Baldwin, 2004), "the body, by withdrawing from the objective world, will carry with it the intentional threads linking it to its surrounding and finally reveal to us the perceiving subject as the perceived world" (p. 84). If knowing requires active engagement, then it follows that teacher reflection, as a form of knowing, should be elicited through various pathways. As Falk-Ross (2012) proposed:

If teachers are asking their students to use reflection to gain perspectives as they learn, then teacher educators need to model and provide opportunities for preservice teachers to experience the same choices in learning style and the same variety in mode of reflection (p. 27).

Multimodality refers to meaning-making through linguistic, visual, audio, and spatial modes of communication. As such, wider possibilities for multimodal reflection include various forms of representation in digital or physical spaces that are inclusive of "complex signifying systems" (Barthes, 1967, p. 39). Specifically, in the drama structure of tableau, participants use gesture, body position, touch, and expression (i.e., "complex signifying systems") to create frozen scenes. The frozen scenes are embodied, three-dimensional images that can be navigated and interpreted by others.

We position the multimodal practice of reflecting through tableau as an arts-based research method known as ethnodrama. Ethnodrama has been described as "dramatizing the data" (Saldana, 2005, p. 2), and in our study the data being dramatized were the preservice teachers' recollections of novice teaching. As a leading practitioner of ethnodrama, Saldana (2011) described four approaches to performing data:

- *Dramatizing interview scripts (verbatim or adapted)
- *Adaptations of documents and published accounts
- *Performed autoethnographic work

*Devised work led by a theatre company

Using ethnodrama methods, we asked preservice teachers to gather written reflections they previously completed for their field experience courses. These reflective texts became the ‘adapted documents’ presented through the drama convention known as tableau. Then our purpose was to explore the use of tableau as a medium for preservice teachers to chronicle significant moments from their field experiences. The main question that guided our exploration was: What does tableau afford the practice of reflecting?

Theoretical Frames

Reflection-In-Action/Activist Reflection

Using tableau as a conduit for preservice teachers’ portrayal of reflection is supported by theories related to reflection, action, and tableau as an embodiment of both. Schon (1983) and Freire (1970/2011) highlighted the importance of “reflection-in-action,” which we conceptualize as *activist*-based because professionals must *think critically* in the moment. Schon argued that ‘technical rationality’ alone will not solve problems because professional dilemmas are ‘divergent’ and do not follow prescribed patterns. Schon highlighted the importance of a reflective attitude that actively occurs in response to unexpected issues, and we connected this portrayal to the unexpected situations preservice teachers often encounter in field experiences. Schon’s vision of an effective teacher seems to be one of an individual who can adopt an interpretive stance while in the act of teaching. And so the practice of reflecting well (or reflection-in-action), which we define in this study as a looking back in order to look forward, is viewed as a desirable disposition to be fostered within our preservice teachers (Merryfield, 1993).

One consideration in using tableau was its potential as a vessel to portray transformation. As such, Boal’s (1995) approach, which has become known as *Image Theatre*, was directly relevant to our work. Although we did not explicitly frame preservice teachers’ experiences as instances of oppression, we acknowledged that Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed* could be effectively used in teacher education situations. For example, in research describing the experiences of bilingual teachers, Rymes, Cahnmann-Taylor and Souto-Manning (2008) used Boal’s *Forum Theatre* convention to present and disrupt instances of oppression as experienced by bilingual novice teachers.

Another consideration in using tableau was the position of our work within a social constructivist perspective of teacher education, in which the novices (e.g., our students) participate in cultural activities with the guidance of more skilled partners (e.g., the faculty), which allows the novices to internalize tools for thinking and taking multiple approaches to interacting with “texts” (Vygotsky, 1978). Borrowing from Northredge (2003), we followed a structure for scaffolding this apprenticeship process that encompassed three instructor responsibilities: 1) Lend students the capacity to frame meaning within a new discourse; 2) Plan students’ excursions from familiar to specialist contexts; and 3) Coach students to use the discourse as active, critical participants (pp. 172-178). Next, we describe this new discourse and the process of scaffolding reflection-in-action.

Tableau as New Discourse

Tableau is defined as a dramatic structure in which a group of participants create a frozen scene by using bodily gestures, positions, and facial expressions (Schneider, Crumpler, & Rogers, 2006). In social performances, such as tableau, people form teams and carry out specific roles to complete the task-at-hand. In performance theory, Goffman (1959) described “teams” and how they evolve through experience and ritual. According to Schechner (2006), these rituals are “among the most powerful experiences life has to offer,” in that while people are in a “liminal state,” they are taken out of the demands of everyday life and “uplifted, swept away, taken over” (p. 70). Furthermore, while immersed in ritually-inspired experiences, people “feel at one with their comrades” and “personal and social differences are set aside” (p. 70). Turner (2004) used the term “communitas” to describe this experience of “ritual camaraderie” (Schechner, 2006).

To build images using a dramatic stance, requires participants to extract very particular memories, corroborated through multiple data sources, and to place the remembered events in a receptacle used to store and view memories. In other words, drama participants capture moments and place them in a communal vessel (e.g., tableau) that allows the interpreters to continually look at the experiences from outside themselves and through the perspectives of others, including their “mirrored selves” (Lacan, 1949). However, participants in tableau also seek a phenomenological determination of images (Bachelard, 1958/1994) that may result in multiple subjectivities.

Tableau is a context in which participants in the tableau, and interpreters of the tableau, can externalize mental images of imagined experience (O’Neill, 1995). Tableau also provides a context for demonstrations of the participants’ actual “lived through” (Rosenblatt, 1978) experiences, allowing them to use language, movement and visualization to express their learning (Rogers, 2010). In this way, tableau gives participants the opportunity to frame meaning within new, multimodal discourses.

Reflection: From the Known to the New

Discourses of reflection are widely accepted in the field of teacher education (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009). Therefore, “reflection” is often a desired outcome of many teacher education programs. Subsequently, teacher educators use reflective methodologies and require artifacts of reflection to document teacher development. For example, Genor (2005) wrote about the need to provide a clearer framework and context for preservice teachers to reflect. She suggested teacher educators provide opportunities for ‘problematizing teaching’ because “unless preservice teachers engage in a process where they methodically consider their teaching, it is unlikely they will challenge ineffective practices” (p. 47). Genor further described how she set up a framework for problematizing teaching through a series of discussion groups that met regularly to apply a methodical, analytical lens to field experiences. She described an improved level of analysis that occurred as a result of this “collaborative inquiry” (2005, p. 50).

Atkinson (2004) described a *reflexive* practitioner (different from *reflective* practitioner) as one who also thinks about classroom events while placing them within the institutional structure and his or her constructed beliefs about self. The critical practitioner “involves interrogating political, ideological and social processes...to explore...power relations in which teachers function” (p. 381). In reflexive activity, the person not only interprets an object or action, but the person can lay bare his or her pre-judgments and experiences. For Atkinson, “the one who reflects” is produced and shaped by these very discourses. Additionally, Boud (2001) made the point that “reflection involves the unprocessed, raw material of experience and engaging with it as a way to make sense of what has occurred. It involves exploring often messy and confused events and focusing on the thoughts and emotions that accompany them” (p. 10).

To examine reflection-in-action, we engaged preservice teachers in tableau to chronicle their experiences with the familiar (what they know) and to develop reflection-in-action in teaching contexts (into the new). And rather than engaging students only through *discussions* of their actions, we addressed this inherent paradox by using an embodied structure for preservice teachers to show what they experienced and to enact their interpretation through multimodal forms.

Method

Performance ethnographers tell stories using various forms—text, choreography, music, spoken word, imagery, theater, art. In creating these stories, ethnographers design aesthetic moments to embody and recreate enactments of cultural others. In this sense, we were performance ethnographers who positioned tableau as an enacted stance to explore how preservice teachers used a particular drama convention as a medium for preservice teachers to chronicle significant moments from their field experiences. We focused on the multimodal affordances of tableau to the practice of reflecting.

Participants and Setting

Participants in this study were enrolled members of a required arts-integration class for elementary preservice teachers. The purpose of the class was to introduce preservice teachers to arts integration theory and to apply practice from the teacher-preparation classroom to the field-experience classroom. The course was based on the tenets of constructivist learning (Crotty, 1998) and most of the coursework involved working in small groups to engage in creative experiences, such as presenting a group response to a textbook reading through movement.

As a frequent instructor for this course, and a former K-12 drama teacher, Margaret used video lesson segments, took photographs, and asked preservice teachers to respond to course assignments through dramatic structures as part of the course curriculum. Based on her experience in previous semesters, she decided to systematically examine the process of using tableau to support reflection-in-action. Therefore, she engaged in her regular routine of teaching and collaborated with Jenifer for data collection and analysis. As such, Jenifer observed course instruction, took field notes, and videotaped tableaux. A consent form was included as part of the research protocol, and only preservice teachers who signed these were considered research

participants. Out of 27 preservice teachers invited, 24 signed the consent form, all of them female and between the ages of 20 and 40.

The course occurred in a traditional university classroom that was large enough to comfortably accommodate all 27 preservice teachers. The title of the class was *Creative Experiences*, but the setting was devoid of any creative appeal. The walls of the classroom were painted white and had a few hand-inscribed posters from another class stuck to them. Tables and chairs were often pushed aside and rearranged to accommodate artistic and active practices.

Instructional Procedures and Data Creation

In this study, preservice teachers chronicled reflections on field experiences through the use of tableau. And these opportunities occurred within the context of Margaret's instruction. Therefore, data were created as a result of Margaret's instructional procedures. Yet, the instructional decisions were not enacted for the purposes of data collection. To reiterate, Margaret always teaches through a process of dramatization, and, in this particular course section, we captured and retained her students' products, which functioned as "adaptations of documents and published accounts" (Saldana, 2011). For purposes of deeper analysis, we gathered the documents as described below.

Collecting pre-texts. First, Margaret asked the preservice teachers to bring to class a written reflection that detailed an important moment from a recent or current field experience. These written assignments were a requirement of another course (Level 1 Internship) and were completed for university supervising teachers (neither Margaret nor Jenifer served as the university supervising teachers). Margaret asked the preservice teachers to draw a picture of their significant moment from the field experience and to capture that moment with a fitting title.

Sharing pre-texts. Margaret asked the preservice teachers to form self-selected groups and to take turns sharing their important events. Most preservice teachers shared their image/title as they discussed their selected moments. Others read their reflections aloud to each other.

Designing and creating adapted documents (Tableau A). Next, due to time limitations, Margaret asked the preservice teachers to select one representative event from within the small group and to design and create a tableau to portray the selected experience. Each group discussed the options and chose one person's recollection. The groups negotiated different ways to enact their selected scenes and they briefly rehearsed the tableaux. When the preservice teachers presented their tableaux, Jenifer took a picture of each group while Margaret invited the rest of the classmates to walk in and through the tableau to gain a "close reading" of the visual "text." Margaret guided the students by asking them, "What do you see?" or "What do you think you see?" Then the person who had the experience explained what was actually being portrayed.

Re-presenting adapted documents (Tableau B). After all tableaux were shared, Margaret asked the small groups to reconvene. Utilizing Boal's activity 'The Image of Transition' (1995, p. 115), she directed the preservice teachers to re-form their small-group tableau to create "the 'ideal' image—how the group would like the reality to be" (Boal, 1995, p. 115). Again, Jenifer

took a picture of each frozen scene while Margaret invited the rest of the classmates to walk in and through the revised tableau to interrogate the scene.

Rereading adapted documents. These re-created tableaux were then used as the impetus for discourse around their *transformative* possibilities. Margaret operationalized Boal's (1979) 'Theatre of the Oppressed' theory in the question, "So what needs to happen to get from tableau A to tableau B?"

Activist reflections (Character step-outs). Margaret then generated questions that called for participants to consider the tableaux from the perspective of people portrayed within them. The final step involved an opportunity for 'characters' to momentarily step out of the held image and utter a thought 'in role.' This required participants to view the tableaux from the perspectives of their mirrored selves (Lacon, 1949) and consider the possible motivations for their character's behaviors *in that moment*.

Data Sources

The preservice teachers' written texts and the pictures that they drew served as a pretext (O'Neill, 1995) and formed the basis for the drama texts that were created through tableau. Given that we were interested in the multimodal affordances of tableau and reflection-in-action, we used the written texts and illustrations as pretexts, but we did not include them in this analysis. Instead, we examined the ways in which the preservice teachers demonstrated reflection-in-action. As such, our primary data sources included (1) a photograph of the initial tableau (Tableau A), (2) a photograph of the final tableau (Tableau B), and (3) video footage of the preservice teachers sculpting, presenting, and interrogating the tableaux.

Data Analysis

Honzl (1940/1998) says the dramatic art form is to be found within the action of a performance. However, for us, we had to slow down the action of the performance to determine how meaning was created through the possible affordances of tableau to the practice of reflecting. For each group, we gathered and ordered the data sources to examine the spatial, semiotic, and ideological changes between each group's Tableau A and Tableau B. Then we examined video footage of tableaux sculpting, presentation, and interrogation with a particular focus on character step-outs to explore reflection-in-action. Our process is outlined and represented in Figure 1 on the following page.

Staging. To borrow from Honzl (1940/2003), the scene ("stage," p. 269) in essence stands for something else – so first we had to ask who or what is being depicted in the scene? Everything in the tableau was taking place in a tightly confined classroom space; yet there was artistic freedom within the space. The actors themselves in each performance functioned as stages as well. In other words, the space in front of a whiteboard became a stage and the classroom chairs assumed a stage-like quality. In Honzl's (1976) words, a "stage could arise anywhere—any place could lend itself to theatrical fantasy" (p. 271). In these instances, we identified the parameters of space as a stage.

Then we recorded our interpretation of the characters, their roles, and the frozen action for each group’s tableau. According to Ribeiro and Fonseca (2011), the arrangement of body-context in improvisational dance takes place by means of compositional procedures. Borrowing from their work, we identified the following compositional procedures as relevant to interpreting tableau staging: repetition, contrast, symmetry, asymmetry, balance, simultaneity, disruptions, tension, and relaxing. We examined each scene to determine the overall composition of the tableau and the denotative role of each element on the stage.



Tableau A “Confrontation”	Tableau B “Consultation”
	
<p>Staging <i>Four characters in the scene. The action is asymmetrical and focuses on the teacher (standing far right) yelling at a student (seated right). The two students are seating with books on their laps/desks. The preservice teacher stands to the side.</i></p>	<p>Staging <i>Four characters in the scene. The action is symmetrical in that the teacher and preservice teacher are each bent over a student. Each pair of teacher/student are focused on the text which the student holds.</i></p>
<p>Staging and Semiotic Framing Character 1: Preservice teacher Role: Horrified observer Social Distance: Far social Gesture: Standing, facing action, feet apart, hands clasped to chest, frowning</p> <p>Character 2: Student Role: Fearful observer Social Distance: Far social Gesture: Sitting, shoulders and body turned away from action, feet apart, hands marking place in text, head tilted away from body and toward action, watching teacher</p> <p>Character 3: Student Role: Scolded student Social Distance: Close social Gesture: Sitting, shoulders and body moving away from action, legs crossed away from action, hands gripping “desk”, head facing action, wide eyes open</p> <p>Character 4: Teacher Role: Disciplinarian Social Distance: Close social Gesture: Standing, shoulders and body moving toward student, feet apart, finger pointing, arms held out slightly, head facing action, focused on student</p>	<p>Staging and Semiotic Framing Character 1: Preservice teacher Role: Helpful mentor Social Distance: Close personal Gesture: Standing bent forward, creating/facing action, feet apart, hands on knees, smiling, watching</p> <p>Character 2: Student Role: Responsive follower Social Distance: Close personal Gesture: Sitting, shoulders and body turned toward action, feet crossed toward preservice teacher, hands pointing to place in text, head tilted toward preservice teacher, looking at text</p> <p>Character 3: Student Role: Cautious follower Social Distance: Close personal Gesture: Sitting, shoulders/body moving away from action, legs crossed at ankle showing comfort, hands holding book, head facing action, looking at text</p> <p>Character 4: Teacher Role: Helpful mentor Social Distance: Close personal Gesture: Standing bent over student, feet together, hand on student’s shoulder, hand on book, head facing action, focused on text</p>

Figure 1: Data analysis process.

Social distance. According to Rodriguez and Dimitrova, (2011), “six values can be assigned to social distance based on how the human subjects’ bodies are represented in the frame: intimate, close personal, far personal, close social, far social, public” (p. 8). We viewed each tableau and developed operational definitions for Rodriguez and Dimitrova’s terminology for the social distance between characters. We were not concerned about measuring distance; rather, we

focused on changes in distance, and we used the terminology to track differences in social positioning between the tableaux.

Gesture. According to Chui (2012), gesture “reveals roles and role relations in a scene as distinct from those in speech...” (p. 601). We therefore watched each tableau and identified prominent gestures, defining prominent gestures as those that caught our attention. According to Langacker (2008), “anything selected is rendered prominent relative to what is unselected” (p. 66). Our process of selection was similar to choreographer Martha Graham’s concept of *contraction*, in which “the contraction draws the gaze to the visceral area of the body and connects with the sheer physicality of the sensation as experienced by the dancer” (Bannerman, 2010, p. 24). In the tableau, figure-positioning demonstrated the intention of “movement” through isolated body parts. The visceral areas were the parts of the body that produced movement or the representation of movement—hands mostly, so there were frozen shots of hands writing on whiteboards and other hands gripping in restraint. We each selected prominent gestures, shared our choices with each other, and came to agreement on our selected gestures and their meanings in each scene.

Analysis of character step-outs. The photographs of the tableaux eliminated all sound and movement and allowed us to focus on staging, social distance, and gesture, or the *embodiment* of the scenes. To recapture the live experience of transformation, we then analyzed each tableau by viewing video of any instances in which Margaret invited individual ‘characters’ to momentarily step out of the tableau to verbalize *in the moment* thoughts. In other words, given that tableaux are silent, *frozen* scenes in which the participants embody roles, the individual actors of the scene were given permission to speak their thoughts in those roles. We transcribed verbatim the thoughts of each character, along with any accompanying commentary from other participants or from Margaret. We determined the role of each character (student, preservice teacher, classroom teacher) and the content of their statements. Then we searched for activist stances and agendas, as revealed through character action. In other words, using Merleau-Ponty’s (2004) view of embodiment, we looked at the trajectory of the action to determine activism. Specifically we traced the characters’ movements by overlaying the two images of the tableaux and asking, “What actions did they take between scenes?”

Ideological representations. The tableau has layered functions: it is a narration of one person’s experience, but it also functions as commentary on larger contextual, educational, and societal issues. It has to showcase the process in a textually and visually appealing way so that the audience can connect; but it has to be personally meaningful. According to Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011), ideological frame analysis “draws together the symbols and stylistic features of an image into a coherent interpretation which provides the ‘why’ behind the representations being analyzed” (p. 10).

Given our isolation of the elements of tableau, we then followed Saldana’s (2009, p. 42) advice: “Despite some preexisting coding frameworks for visual representation, I feel the best approach to analyzing visual data is a holistic, interpretive lens guided by strategic questions.” Taking a ‘holistic’ approach, we read across the tableaux for the ways in which preservice teachers connected to activist stances and reflected-in-action.

Interpretations of Tableaux

We identified ‘presence’ as the best descriptor for what happened throughout tableau development and sharing. We noticed the preservice teachers were quick to collaborate and create the images; and they were mentally engaged as other groups shared their scenes. (No one checked her phone. No one left the room.) Their engagement spoke of the ways in which tableau yielded new perspectives and information in a *crystallized* form.

Visual Retelling and Multimodalities

The visual representation of reflection was an affordance that was strongly evidenced in the video analysis. The careful positioning of people within the tableaux and what they communicated through bodily and facial semiotics was clearly documented. The preservice teachers discussed the visual representations thoughtfully and contributed to each other’s ideas.



Figure 2: Preservice teacher at the whiteboard.

The photograph shown in Figure 2 chronicles a preservice teacher depicting an event in her internship when her university supervisor conducted a formal observation and the students had difficulty understanding the concept she was teaching. She had taught “main idea” the previous week and thought the students understood it. But, despite her various efforts to help them, the students collectively showed a level of confusion that both frustrated and embarrassed her. When the preservice teacher’s body language was examined closely, the raised shoulders show tension, the outstretched fingers on her right hand suggest frustration, the wide eyes and the closed lips present an image of a novice teacher who is just about to reach a desperation point and, in our opinion, it is a very telling and well-depicted image.

In her character step-out, this actor expressed her fear in the moment, “Oh God, I’m bombing this observation. These kids are killing me. Please, someone give me an answer.” The other preservice teachers identified with the teacher role as we observed nods of knowing throughout the room.



Figure 3: Preservice teachers acting as students who don't understand, in tableau.

The rest of this small group, shown in Figure 3, portrayed the students as confused, and there is a marked contrast between the preservice teacher's desperation (Figure 2) and the "children's" lack of interest or connection with what is being taught. The angling of the heads suggests confusion, the crossed legs convey a resistance to what is being taught, and their body language in general suggests that they would rather be somewhere else. Their character step-outs revealed another side to the story: "What is she talking about? What's the main idea—about what? We haven't read anything yet!?" When the preservice teachers heard the students' perspective, a communal wondering occurred: What if the elementary students could not define the main idea because they viewed finding the main idea as a process that occurred in the act of reading? The preservice teachers discussed the need to view classroom situations from the perspectives of the students; they contemplated the power of their words, and they lamented the pressures of teaching for a grade.

As the instructor, Margaret mentally identified many pivot points as possibilities for further discussion—the perception that the preservice teacher equated "good" teaching to correct answers, the idea that "main idea" could be taught and understood in one lesson, the notion that student confusion can become a powerful teaching/learning experience, etc. Yet, Margaret refrained, and the preservice teachers made their own connections. They went on to discuss the physical space within the tableau, examining the positioning of the teacher against the students. A preservice teacher made the analogy to a tennis match in which the audience had to look back-and-forth between the teacher and the students to interpret the scene. If teachers are physically positioned in opposition to the students, how can they be "with" students? The preservice teachers also commented on the actors' gestures and expressions, and these created multiple canvases of interpretive spaces.

In this particular scene, tableau enabled a visual retelling affordance of an internship situation and was entered into with commitment by the participants because they were engaged in the work. The drama method required specific attention to the order of the details in the situation being reflected upon: "I had to recall details in order to portray what happened that I might not have otherwise."

Embodied Engagement

In addition to the visual affordances of tableau, changes in role necessitated changes in the body; changes in the body created changes in perspective and insight; and, ultimately, changes in insight created changes in role and stance. Empathy is deeply rooted in the body experience, and this enabled us to recognize “others” as people like us (Gallese, 2001).



Figure 4: Preservice teachers enacting a student's tantrum.

For example, one group shared an experience in which a preservice teacher witnessed a student throwing a temper tantrum because the classroom teacher wanted him to wait in line to have his work checked. In Tableau A (Figure 4), the preservice teacher is not depicted in the tableau. Instead, we are viewing the scene through her eyes, and we see the classroom teacher ignoring the temper tantrum and attending to the students in line. The teacher is turned away from the child on the floor, focused on the text of another, and the other students are trained to do the same, although two of them steal subtle glances at their disruptive classmate. The ensuing discussion revealed that the preservice teachers strongly identified with the classroom teacher. Their comments focused on behavior management strategies, Attention Deficit Disorders, and a general amazement at the teacher's ability to ignore the distracting behavior of “that” kid (every classroom has one). In general, the preservice teachers viewed this scene as a lesson.



Figure 5: Character step-out to discuss the tableau.

In Figure 5, the “problem child” was given a voice through the character step-out. The child revealed his social isolation, personal disconnection, and confusion with the content. Instantly,

the preservice teachers expressed sighs of sympathy and immediate problem-solving toward a classroom of inclusion. No longer did the preservice teachers identify with the classroom teacher; instead, a wave of support focused on the student. The image was then re-sculpted to show a tableau in which the teacher took a proactive approach toward this child.

Despite the resolution of the revised tableau, lingering questions remained. The child/actor revealed that her extended time on the floor, with arm outreached toward the teacher, helped her understand what the child might be feeling. She physically felt the rejection of the teacher and the dismissive/curious stares of the classmates. She experienced the isolation that the child might have felt, and her embodiment of the child's situation created a deep understanding of his needs. In her mind, she created the student's story as she waited for her classmates to walk through the tableau. And through personifying the student, she raised this question: "How can preservice teachers advocate for children during field experiences?" In response, one student stated, "Often times when we reflect, we think about what happened and what we can do to fix it, and not why it is happening in the first place. Thinking for the characters in the reflection aids in determining the trigger for the situation." Through tableau, the preservice teachers developed empathetic insight that represented a unique essence of tableau as an art form.

Action is Activism

As a three-dimensional literacy, viewers of tableau can quite literally walk in, around, and through the tableau texts of other groups and experience the literal, albeit frozen, action of characters. Through these exploratory positions they experienced a non-traditional and reformational approach to creating and interpreting text. Additionally, characters in the tableaux felt actions as they viewed experiences from the roles of the people in the scenes. In these ways, the use of tableau allowed for 'reflection-in-action' (Schon, 1983) and, because of the opportunities to 'live through' moments of significance in a public space, a mode of reflective action occurred.

For example, one group recounted a scene in which a preservice teacher watched in horror as the classroom teacher screamed at a child. In Tableau A (Figure 6), the preservice teacher represents the powerlessness preservice teachers often feel as visitors in classroom contexts. They are not yet teachers, they do not have pedagogical expertise, and they are passive witnesses to



Figure 6: Preservice teachers enacting a screaming teacher.

malpractice. The preservice teacher's disequilibrium is demonstrated in the asymmetry of this scene. The classroom teacher holds the power, and everyone must yield.



Figure 7: Preservice teachers enacting classroom co-teachers.

In revisioning this scene, the preservice teachers created an alternate reality of projected possibility, then they sculpted the figures to reflect their new vision. In Tableau B (Figure 7), power is equally distributed between the teacher and preservice teacher, as revealed in the symmetry and simultaneity of the scene. The teacher and preservice teacher seem to be co-teachers. The preservice teachers' reflections-in-action resulted in a scene in which the preservice teacher mirrored her mentor teacher's behavior, and that behavior was helpful and supportive of the students. In essence, the symmetry of desired behavior was at play between the teachers as well as the students. Everyone was peaceful; everyone was involved.

In many ways, the tableau became an extension of embodied movements of preservice teachers as they began to have an evolving activist stance toward classroom practice. As Smith (2008) claimed, "A culture nurtures and makes the body behave in a certain way through movements of everyday living." (p. 81). Through the movements of everyday living, these preservice teachers performed the actions of reflection in classrooms spaces that functioned as projects of possibility.

Discussion

In educational contexts, it is often stated that empathy can be taught uniquely through drama (Heathcote, 1984). In this study, participants created tableaux of moments of significance and as acts of "collaborative witnessing" (Ellis, 2013). They presented scenes as inquiries that could be interrogated by co-researchers (other preservice teachers) in the public domain of the college classroom. As witnesses to these visual reflections, participants discussed their wonderings and interpretations by "reading" the tableaux. Iser (1978) described the creation of images during the act of reading as "a constant accumulation of references" (p. 148). In Margaret's class, the images were created with bodies, expressions, positioning, and space, then these images arrived in the interpreter's mind through different multimodal sources. The varied images were not static; they built on each other like modeling clay. Each additional image reshaped the previous one.

In addition to the visual layers of interpretation for the viewer, tableau enabled embodiment. Through tableau as a form of “communal vessel,” preservice teachers and teacher educators walked back through remembered experiences from the perspective of each participant, including their alternate selves. In so doing, the participants manipulated roles, performed in role, imagined spaces as the enacted real, embraced reflective distance, and viewed the act from the interstices of disequilibrium.

Yet, all is not perfect, and reflection-in-action is not easily transferred to activism in the world. In our movement toward reflection-in-action, the university classroom can scarcely replicate the ‘confusing and messy events’ of the K-12 classroom. Therefore, based on the theories of Schon (1983; 1987) and Freire (1970/2011), we framed the reflection process as an *action* that involved both looking backwards and looking forward. This was significant because traditionally reflection has been viewed as thinking about the past. According to Schon and Freire, true reflection is borne out of considering past action but then looking at ways to transform the situation being reflected upon through action. Through this study we argue that when tableau was used to present both situations as they were *and* how they could be, tableau became a conduit for looking backwards *and* forwards. Using a process of tracing, we examined the *in-between spaces* in which “bodily movement [was] a source of historical information and communication that can be identified through a cultural context” (Smith, 2008, p. 79).

Freire (1970/2011) spoke of transformed praxis as coming out of active reflection, and we claim drama to be an essentially activist literacy because it confronts reality while simultaneously seeking to transform reality. Boal (1979), in his foreword to *Theatre of the Oppressed*, described theatre as “necessarily political” (p. ix), and for that reason advocated for its use “as a weapon. A very efficient weapon” (ix). In powerful words attributed to Brecht, the idea of theatre as a practical force was similarly expressed: “Art is not a mirror to hold up to society, but a hammer with which to shape it” (Brecht, as cited in McLaren and Leonard, p. 80).

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