Listening: a radical pedagogy
Bronwyn Davies

Abstract
Familiar concepts of listening, such as listening for meaning, or listening to judge the correctness of the other’s understanding, or even listening in order to know the identity of the other, are integral to the habitual repetitions through which everyday pedagogy is practiced. In this paper I will open up the concept of listening, drawing in particular on Nancy’s analysis of listening, as an active process of opening oneself to the resonances of the other:

To listen is to enter that spatiality by which, at the same time, I am penetrated, for it opens up in me as well as around me, and from me as well as toward me: it opens me inside me as well as outside, and it is through such a double, quadruple, or sextuple opening that a ‘self’ can take place. To be listening is to be at the same time outside and inside, to be open from without and from within, hence from one to the other and from one in the other. (Nancy 2007: 14)

The supposedly closed system of the teacher’s self is made vulnerable in the act of such listening. She can no longer be the one positioned solely as manager of correct or legitimate forms of knowing (Davies 2008, 2009). Allowing the resonance of the other to register in one’s body involves opening oneself to an ongoing process of Deleuzian differenciation, to becoming other, to a process of evolution that takes one beyond the already known.
A common-sense distinction between teachers and students is that the one teaches (through speaking) and the other learns (through listening). In this common-sense version of the world the teacher has correct knowledge and the student must acquire it. The teacher only listens to students to check the correctness of their knowledge, or to know and judge them as individuals and to correct their behaviour. But as Harold Garfinkel (1967) said, common-sense is the domain of cultural dopes—those who are shaped by their culture, who lack reflexive awareness and the capacity to question the ethics of their practices. In the radical pedagogy I want to explore here, I use radical to refer both to the inherent nature of pedagogy, and to a desire for fundamental change in the inherent forms of pedagogical encounters.

In this paper I want to open up the concept and practice of listening, and with it the idea of what pedagogy is or might be. I want to go beyond listening for meaning, or identity, to listening, for both teachers and students, as openness to the other and to the not-yet-known. It is primarily in the field of early childhood education that teachers' listening has begun to emerge as a significant pedagogical practice (see for example Ceppi & Zini, 1998; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence 1999, Lenz-Taguchi 2009, Moss & Petrie 2002, Dahlberg & Moss 2005, Rinaldi 2005). Carlina Rinaldi says: “Behind each act of listening there is desire, emotion, and openness to differences, to different values and points of view... Learning how to listen is a difficult undertaking; you have to open yourself to others... Competent listening creates a deep opening and predisposition toward change” (Rinaldi, 2006: 114).

By focusing on listening, and on teachers as listeners in particular, I am troubling the familiar teacher-student binaries in which the student is othered, even abjected, as the one who does not know or who does not behave correctly. In its place I want to develop the idea of listening as Deleuzian encounter, and as an ongoing emergence of oneself in relation to the other¹. In doing so I want to make a strong distinction between self as identity (that is relatively fixed, linked to ego and to the defense of oneself against the other), and self as process (an emergent relational being, open to the other and to the

¹ I have two ongoing projects with others who have inspired me in this thinking. One is with a group of colleagues in Australia: Susanne Gannon, Constance Ellwood, Catherine Camden Pratt, Katerina Zabrodska and Peter Bansel. Our forthcoming book, edited by me and Susanne is called Pedagogical Encounters. The other major project, also with Susanne Gannon, is work with Jonathan Wyatt and Ken Gale from the UK. The four of us are engaged in a project on Deleuze and collaborative writing. The thinking is also a further development of the work I have done with Cath Laws, and arises in strong part from my observations of Reggio Emilia inspired schools in Sweden. It is also inspired by my current situation at work where my own “Bob” is at work on me. This paper, this thought, is dedicated to these others, co-researchers, students and teachers, and managers, with whom I am an emergent set of thoughts and affects in process.
not-yet-known) (Davies, 2000). Foucault said: “If we are asked to relate to the question of identity, it must be an identity to our unique selves. But the relationships we have to have with ourselves are not ones of identity, rather, they must be relationships of differentiation, of creation, of innovation. To be the same is really boring” (Foucault, 1997a: 166).

It is this differentiating, creative, innovative self-as-process that I want to privilege in developing a radical pedagogy that begins with listening. With Nancy, then, I will ask “What does it mean for a being to be immersed entirely in listening, formed by listening or in listening, listening with all his being?” (Nancy 2007: 4).

My first moment of being “immersed entirely in listening, [being] formed by listening” (Nancy 2007: 4) that I will explore here, takes place in a preschool. The listener here is the child. The story was told in a collective biography workshop (Davies and Gannon, 2006), where the child listens to the sound of the piano and the triangle, the teacher and the other children. In this moment listening involves, in Nancy’s words, stretching the ear “—an expression that evokes a singular mobility, among the sensory apparatuses, of the pinna of the ear—it is an intensification and a concern, a curiosity or an anxiety” (Nancy 2007: 5).

The teacher opened up a box of musical instruments. She asked who would like the tambourines, who would like the drums, and last of all, who would like the triangles. The small girl had never played with any of these instruments, so she did not raise her hand. The triangles were given to the last ones left who had chosen no instruments. The triangles seemed inferior, the small girl thought, when compared to the drums. The teacher demonstrated how each instrument was to be played. The triangle must be held so, by the string, and struck just so with the small metal stick. Then the teacher sat down at the piano and played them the tune they were to accompany. Then again, with the children this time, and the noise was terrible, the children seeming to ignore completely the sound coming from the piano. The small girl carefully hit her triangle, but the sound was ugly and flat. The other triangle children ran their stick around the triangle hitting all the sides, laughing, making the triangle fly off in all directions with a jangling sound muddled up with the whack and thump of the drums and the terrible jingling of the tambourines. She anxiously watched the other children’s wild experimentation with their instruments until, suddenly, she could see that she must loosen her grasp on the stick before the triangle would sing. When the piano started again she noticed the sound of her triangle came after the note she was supposed to
accompany. She listened hard, focused only on the piano, the triangle and the stick. The teacher repeated the tune. The small girl found she had to begin to strike not when the piano note came, but the moment before it came. Her body discovered exactly the moment the stick must begin its descent in order for the 2 sounds to come together. The sound of the piano and the triangle exactly together made a warm feeling in the small of her back that ran down the back of her legs and into her shoes.

In this moment the child listens for meaning, but much more than this, she listens for sound. Her listening generates something new, not located in the teacher or in her, but in-between her, the other children, the teacher, the piano and the triangle. Her attentive listening is not just with ears for the teacher’s meaning or intention. She listens with her whole body to the vibration of the piano and the timing of the beat. Her body discovers a new way of moving in relation to another, where the other is not just other humans but also musical instruments. Together they produce a new sound—a new capacity for engagement. The child has listened with all her being, and an emergent self finds itself co-creating a new event that she could not have imagined beforehand. In Nancy’s words:

To listen is to enter that spatiality by which, at the same time, I am penetrated, for it opens up in me as well as around me, and from me as well as toward me: it opens me inside me as well as outside, and it is through such a double, quadruple, or sextuple opening that a ‘self’ can take place. To be listening is to be at the same time outside and inside, to be open from without and from within, hence from one to the other and from one in the other. (Nancy 2007: 14)

It is through listening that being is made possible. This is nothing to do with knowing an essential being as a phenomenon that can be pinned down. It is a form of being-in-relation-to-the-other, the other that comes from a gift of listening and openness to the not-yet-known. The self continuously comes into existence and creates events that are evolutionary, unfolding possibilities that are not attributable to one or the other. In this very moment of listening, the self forms itself in relation, in the ongoing dynamic process of being heard.

Deleuze offers some vital concepts that can help us unfold this radical pedagogy that is emergent in acts of listening. These are difference and differenciation. Difference has generally, at least since Aristotle, been understood as categorical difference. In this model of difference, the other is discrete and distinct from the self, with difference lying in the other and normality in oneself. Identity is constructed through a string of binaries in which the other's sameness as, or difference from, oneself is made real. Deleuze
(2004) offers another approach to difference in which difference comes about through a continuous process of becoming different, of differenciation. Massey (2005: 21) describes these two approaches as:

1. "discrete difference/multiplicity (which refers to extended magnitudes and distinct entities, the realm of diversity)", and
2. "continuous difference/multiplicity (which refers to intensities, and to evolution rather than succession)"

In the first approach difference is being "divided up, a dimension of separation”, while in the second, Deleuzian approach, difference is “a continuum, a multiplicity of fusion.” Deleuze wishes “to instate the significance, indeed the philosophical primacy, of the second (continuous) form of difference over the first (the discrete) form. What is at issue is an insistence on the genuine openness of history, of the future” (Massey, 2005: 21). These two approaches to difference are closely linked to the distinction I am making between self as identity and self as process. What we are both interested in is “how things become different, how they evolve and continue to evolve beyond the boundaries of the sets they have been distributed into” (Williams, 2003: 60). And in this openness to evolution there is important work to be done in generating a radically new understanding of relationality, of understanding what it means to be in relation to, and known through the other—including both animate and inanimate others.

The discrete person, existing in its separation from the other is, in Deleuzian thought, a mistaken fantasy. We are in connection even when we don’t realise we are. The personal identity of liberal humanist thought is in need of continuous defence and it closes off the outside. It forecloses the acts of listening that I want to explore here. Deleuze ponders this conception of the self as self-in-relation through his collaboration with Félix Guattari:

‘When I said Félix and I were rather like two streams, what I meant was that individuation doesn’t have to be personal. We’re not at all sure we’re persons: a draft, a wind, a day, a time of day, a stream, a place, a battle, an illness all have a nonpersonal individuality. They have proper names. We call them “hecceities.” They combine like two streams, two rivers. They express themselves in language, carving differences in it, but language gives each its own individual life and gets things passing between them... From this viewpoint, writing with someone else becomes completely natural. It’s just a question of something passing through you, a current, which alone has a proper name. Even when you think you’re writing on
your own, you’re always doing it with someone else you can’t always name.’

(Deleuze, 1995: 141)

The specificity of each of Deleuze and Guattari, their material existence in the world with their particular histories are vital resources for this work-in-relation, but each is open to the other and their focus is on what emerges between them. This is what matters; the music for the small girl; the haecceities for Deleuze and Guattari; the creation of a third stream, a flow of new ideas, a movement.

Having put forward this new idea of selves-in-relation, let me step back, into the world of pedagogy as separation, in which the teacher-student binary that I began with is being enacted. This example comes from Cath Laws, a principal of a school for “special” children, children who cannot manage or be managed in normal school (Laws and Davies, 2000; Davies 2008).

*Categoryical Difference: Bob and Shane*

“Striated spaces are those which are rigidly structured and organized, and which produce particular, limited movements and relations between bodies. ... Smooth spaces, by contrast, are those in which movement is less regulated or controlled, and where bodies can interact – and transform themselves – in endlessly different ways” (Hickey-Moody and Malins, 2007: 11). The story of Bob and Shane shows the way in which the striations of schooling, and relations of power work to constitute these particular people as recognizably a “principal”, and “a student”. I do not wish to focus on Bob’s singular identity here, but on the forces that create not just this Bob, but Bobs everywhere within schools and other educational institutions. Bob does not belong in a historical period that is past, and he does not just belong in Australia. He is a particular knotty configuration of the subject position Principal, that counter-discourses continually undo, only to find the same knots tying themselves back up again inside the striations, the rigid structure and organization “which produce particular, limited movements and relations between bodies” (Hickey-Moody and Malins, 2007: 11).

The story of Bob and Shane, as it is told by Cath, contains a familiar scenario between a student and a school principal. The Principal, Bob, works to position himself *as Principal*, that is as someone categorically different from Shane. As Principal, he has access to correct knowledge that it is his duty to impart to Shane. The student, as abject other, has no knowledge that is of value to Bob—nothing that Bob thinks should be listened to. Shane is the one who must listen and demonstrate that he has done so.
Shane had been attending Cath's special school, and then returned to his regular school. He was suspended again when he came to the school assembly wearing a baseball cap:

Bob: Take that hat off son, we don't wear hats inside. You should know that.
Shane: (Does not move)
Bob: I said take it off now.
Shane: (Gets up and walks out of assembly)
Bob: Stay right there. Don't turn your back on me, son! Come back here right now!!

In this moment, Bob, in his role as school principal, positions himself as the one, and the only one, who establishes and maintains the order of the school—establishing its striations in keeping with his idea of what this school is and should be. Bob’s words lie within and affirm the striations of the social, legal and moral order, which Bob has the right, and even the obligation, to create and maintain. The school assembly is an ideal context for the performative display of Bob’s power to constitute the striated order of the school. Of such order Foucault says:

What characterizes power is the fact that it is a strategic relation which has been stabilized through institutions. So the mobility in power relations is limited, and there are strongholds that are very, very difficult to suppress because they have been institutionalized and are now very pervasive in courts, codes, and so on. All this means that the strategic relations of people are made rigid. (Foucault 1997a: 169)

Bob tells Shane to remove his “hat”, positioning Shane as the abjected other, as one who is unacceptably ignorant of the social and moral order of the school (You should know that). When Shane does not obey Bob’s order Bob reads this in terms of his own positioning as principal. Bob and Shane are separated in this moment more by the categories than by Shane’s act. Bob cannot listen to Shane—cannot hear anything other than the affront to his own person and the position he occupies. Bob repeats his instruction, as if Shane might be deaf. To Bob’s amazement Shane does not remove his hat, and he walks out. As he walks out Bob reiterates the terms through which Shane must constitute himself as abject and obedient other—willing to be humiliated in front of the school. Shane’s action punctures Bob’s performance, and he becomes manifestly the one who is not in control of Shane. He regains his position as the person who rightfully holds power by suspending Shane for another two days. When Shane’s mother brings Shane back to Cath’s school, where he must return now that he is suspended, Shane is
still wearing his baseball cap:

Cath: So what happened – you were doing so well.
Shane: I wouldn’t take my hat off.
Cath: Good heavens – you made that your hill to die on?
Shane: (Takes off his hat. He is patchily bald – a really bad haircut).
    I couldn’t take it off and let everyone see this!
Cath: No. Guess not.

Cath offers Shane a speaking position, as one who can speak and is capable of making a coherent account of his action. She opens up a relational space (in Deleuzian terms a smooth space) in which Shane can, with Cath, make his action make sense. This is more than Cath being understanding and kind, and it is more than Shane telling what he already knows. It is Cath being open to hear what she does not know already and it is Shane discovering what it is possible to say inside that open space. She does not perform as one in authority whose existing knowledges and her right to assert them needs to be defended. Her authority lies in her openness to the other, to what she does not yet know about the other, to what she makes hearable from the other. In that relational space, Shane can reveal his humiliating haircut and the necessity of keeping it hidden. She does not offer a counter-narrative, that he should, for example, learn to take the inevitable harassment that the other students would have engaged in—that he should in fact become someone she deems appropriate within the striated order of the school. She listens and so creates an event, a haecceity between herself and Shane, that enables her to comprehend, from Shane’s point of view, the event in assembly.

Two days later Cath goes to the regular school with Shane for the suspension resolution meeting. This meeting is fascinating in its explicit elaboration of Bob’s philosophy—his concept of categorical difference as it operates between teachers and students:

Bob: You broke every rule in the book. Out of uniform, ignoring a direction and leaving the school grounds. If you don’t resolve this suspension you will not be coming back to my school. First up, I want you to admit you did the wrong thing and an apology.

Shane: (quietly) I’m sorry. It was wrong.

Bob: You’re a child and I am an adult. I have the power, and as you are a child you have no power. That is how it is. When I was a child I had no power, and I had to listen to the adults around me, my parents, teachers and other adults that
were involved in my life. They knew what was best for me and the adults in your life know what is best for you. Do you understand, son?

Shane:  (Shane has a paper clip in his hands that he has bent so that it is a straight piece of wire. He is scratching his wrist with this wire. The scratches are deep enough to draw spots of blood. He has a face like a thundercloud, but remains silent).

Although Shane produces the words that Bob requires, the wound Bob feels to his person is not satisfied by Shane’s apology or by his agreement to be positioned as wrong. Bob wants to secure his rights to the positioning through which he accomplishes the particular personhood he desires, that is, as the one who has, by right, by virtue of his own rightness, the power to create the order he desires. Shane’s expression of pain, visible in his action with the paper clip, is not visible to Bob. He is not open to Shane. The future between them is not open. It is closed. It will be contained within the striated order that Bob requires for the maintenance of his position, and with it his personal identity.

Bob: You must make sure that you wear your school uniform every day of the week. We don’t have school uniforms for fun you know. We have them for a reason. When you put on our school uniform, you are agreeing to obey the rules of this school. You are saying, that you know that the teachers at this school have the power and that you will do whatever it is that they tell you to do. That uniform says that you are happy to be controlled by the teachers at this school whenever you wear it.

(Shane is still silent – scratching with the clip).

Bob: Son, do you know why I don’t speed when I drive my car?
Shane: Because it’s dangerous?
Bob: Well yes, but that’s not the answer I wanted, try again.
Shane: Because you will get booked?

(Cath thinks to herself that both these answers are reasonable, and has no idea where this is heading).

Bob: It doesn’t matter if I get booked, I have a lot of money. I will pay the fine. No, the reason that I don’t speed is because when I get in the car I am agreeing to obey the rules of the road. I know that the Police have the power of the road and when I drive I have to obey their rules. It is the same as when you put on our uniform and come to our school. So, I don’t want to see you near my office
again. You shouldn’t need time out if you are really ready to come back to our school. (Bob rises from his chair and stands over Shane and continues). So if you agree to follow our rules we will see you back here on Monday, but I warn you, I do not want to see you in here again, because I may not be so lenient next time.

Bob attempts to remove the desire for Shane’s obedience from himself to Shane. When Shane puts on the uniform he must take up as his own the desire to obey, not out of fear of punishment, not because he might cause himself and others harm, but because he is ready and happy to be controlled, to become an appropriate other to Bob within the striated order of the school. He can come back to school only if he can perform himself as having developed the desire for and commitment to obedience. It is thus desire that is being worked on, that is being contained and limited to the particular set of striations that Bob, with his state-sanctioned authority, can ordain. Surveillance in Foucault’s Panopticon is always present, but itself invisible. The subjects under surveillance take up as their own, the desire to be appropriate subjects. But where the all-seeing eye does not succeed in re-shaping desire, surveillance may become explicit, and even brutal (Foucault, 1977b).

My question here in relation to Bob is: Do principals and teachers have an ethical responsibility to be open to continuous difference in a Deleuzian sense, and hence to the possibility of change in themselves, and the events they create between them? Accustomed to being granted the morally ascendant positioning, are there reasonable grounds for asserting that Bob’s positioning is ethically compromised if he is not able to question the absolute rightness of his position, and to open himself up to new ways of seeing, new ways of understanding the relationship between himself and the students? As Cath amply demonstrates, conflict can be resolved quite differently, through openness to the other and the related willingness to listen. She listens to Shane, and Shane, in response, listens to her, and then listens to Bob. But Bob cannot listen. There is to be no evolution here. Bob and Shane are hung out to dry on the striations of so-called normal schooling.

If Bob could listen, what might he hear? How did Shane sound as he sat in assembly with his hat on? How did he sound when he left? Although he said nothing—could say nothing—could offer no explanation—there was much that could have been heard, independent of such meaning making with words. Even silence can be heard. What if Bob had stretched his ears in Nancy’s sense, putting his own sensory organs in motion, and putting himself to one side?
In case this story should be heard as a story about a bad individual, rather than the story of a subject caught in the knotty configurations of adult authority and pedagogy of the young, I want to tell another story of myself as adult. The moment in this story happened in Sweden in a Reggio Emilia inspired preschool called Trollet (see Davies 2009 for more details).

At the end of this first group session, instead of going off to his allocated group, one boy decided to show me his favourite picture book. We sat together in animated discussion over his favourite picture, discussing its intricacies, he in Swedish and me in English. It was an exciting picture, with a bank in the middle and a tunnel under the bank through which robbers were crawling. One robber had already successfully robbed the bank and was running away. There were cowboys and indians on horses fighting, and a cowboy buying an ice cream at an ice cream parlour. There were dogs barking and exotic mountains in the distance. There was much here for us to discuss. He told a teacher, who briefly came into the room to see what was happening, that he found it really exciting to talk to me—and indeed he was excited, sometimes clutching his genitals in an ecstasy of delight. The teacher told me, later, that she had been surprised at his visible and voluble animation, since he is a boy who rarely talks. Later he took me by the hand and showed me around the whole preschool explaining who was in each of the areas that we could see through the windows, and showing me what each space was for within the piazza.

There is something to be learned here in relation to listening. The boy was happier talking to me than any other child I have worked with, or played with. Here, a boy who does not usually speak initiates an encounter, in which he is able to speak with animation and excitement to someone who does not understand the specific words of his language, and therefore has her didactic tongue completely stilled. Together we sit down to explore the intricacies of the picture. He draws my attention to particular details, looking at my face to see if I am attending, then telling me more, laughing as he does so. Robbed of any capacity to engage in typical adult or teacher controlling or even guiding talk, I listen instead to the sound of his voice, and I register his happiness. Sometimes we swap words -- he giving me hund and me giving him dog, but mostly we share a space in which the meanings of words are not important, since all the meanings we need are there in the illustration and in his excitement. It is a haptic space, which Roy describes as “a space of affect rather than measures and properties, of events rather than things ... it is a terrain of proliferating connections and endless becomings ...” (Roy, 2005: 34). In this moment
we have a space made up of two people and a book, not doing what they habitually do, able to take this line of flight together because the orderly plane of existence established by everyone else makes it possible, permissable. The teacher checks them, and accepts that they have gone off into another order, other than the one she was establishing.

The point that I want to take here from this story is that I did not open up a space for the boy because I’m a good person, or a better teacher, but because my usual array of adult positions, from which I might have thought I had something to contribute to his understanding or appreciation of the picture, were foreclosed.

In the radical pedagogy I am exploring here, in which primacy is given to the self-in-process, and to differenciation as evolution, listening involves stretching the ears, and all the senses. It requires a focussed attention, an intensification of attention to the other and the happening in-between. The neurons of the body must pick up, as a mirror, the being of the other, the minute details of sound and movement, of affect. Listening involves much more than the de-coding of sound for meaning. When one truly listens, the whole body is oriented toward the other. One’s lips and tongue, for example, may work to shape the sound one hears in one’s own mouth, as an integral part of coming to know or imagine what message the words carry. The neurologists speak of mirror neurons that enable us, through mirroring the pain or the joy or the movement or the sound of the other to know the other through an intimate, social synaesthesia, where the words, the sonority, the affect of one are heard in the ears of the other, but also in their mouths, their eyes, their hearts, their gut (Bradshaw 2009).

My final story is from a Reggio Emilia inspired preschool in Sweden where I had a chance to observe for the day. This story explores mutual openness to the other and resonances from self to self, and the relatedness of sonority and sense as these are embodied in the participants. The event that emerges between the two children playing bandy does not belong in either of them, but in the movement between them made possible by their openness to differenciation, to becoming different in relation to each other.

At playtime two of the four year olds, a boy and a girl, were playing bandy (a fast game with stick and ball not unlike ice hockey). They were in an area perfectly suited to their game—a small amphitheatre with a smooth surface and walls that could catch the speeding ball, which then bounced back out ready to be hit back. They quickly gained control of their sticks and the ball, and a rhythmic play was set up between the two of them, passing the ball swiftly and effectively back and forth between them. They were
relaxed and skilled in a way that was captivating to watch. Just as they were completely immersed in the movement of ball and stick and each other, to the rhythmic and satisfying sound of ball on stick, so I was caught in the circle of their haecceity.

Then a third child, a younger boy, tried to join them. He had a stick and ball. The boy told him emphatically to go away, but he would not listen. There was only enough room for two to play in the way that the boy and girl had unfolded between them. The older boy insisted that the younger boy could not join in, but the younger boy firmly stood his ground, not hearing that he was not welcome. In frustration the older boy pushed the curved end of the bandy stick toward him, providing an unequivocal sign for the boy to leave. But the small boy would not budge. The older boy turned his stick around and poked the pointy end toward the face of the intruder, but still he would not back off. It was a fierce battle of wills, and anger was rising.

A teacher intervened. A fourth child seemed at that point to want to join in. The teacher pointed out that there were two balls and four sticks so all four children should be able to play in this space. She did not make a space in which the conflict could have any meaning other than unacceptable aggression from the older boy. The original two recommenced passing the ball between them, but both had lost their bodily co-ordination. They were awkward and could not hit the ball well. After a few passes, the girl regained her composure and skill. But the boy had lost his completely even after the two intruders had left. His body was so awkward and ungainly I began to wonder if I had missed something and it was actually another child from the one who was so skilful previously.

In the first part of this story, the children were one with stick and ball and place. They were completely present in the encounter with each other and with the physical space of amphitheatre and the game of bandy. They created a haecceity. “Haecceities are crucial to matters of ecology because they make no distinction between centre and periphery, inside and outside, subject and object and, therefore, humans and nature” (Halsey, 2007: 145-6). The game takes them on a line of flight as they momentarily accomplish themselves as an exceptional team of bandy-players, in which the ball flows between them as if ball and stick and bodies and sound are part of the self-same ensemble. The skill is not just in the bodies of the children, but also in a set of complex relations between two people, a ball and two sticks and the space they are playing in.

When the third child cannot hear that he cannot join their game without spoiling it, and
when the teacher cannot support their right to continue as they were, their bodily competence evaporates; the connection between bodies and ball and sticks is gone. They have been found to be in the wrong for defending the haecceity they had been caught up in. In the beginning they were completely at ease in their relationship to each other and the space between them in which they could become exceptional bandy players. Their world became the movement of stick and ball and the deeply satisfying rhythm and sound. They were powerful in their sense of bodily competence and agency as all the elements that were necessary, were assembled. The intruder saw what they accomplished and wanted it for himself too. He could not bear to see that it could only exist without him. When the teacher declared his right to be there, the assemblage collapsed, and with it the older boy’s bodily knowledge of how to participate in this bandy-assemblage.

In that precise moment of play, that I was so lucky to see, when bodies and sticks and balls connected, perhaps for the first time in just that way, in an aesthetic, pleasurable, haecceity, something was being accomplished that could not be squeezed into a smaller space, or afford to include someone who did not understand what they were doing. The bigger boy appeared to know that, but his knowledge was in conflict with another discourse of sharing, and turns. Harmonious group relations require that we develop complex respectful relations, which involve respect for the other, and for the agreed ways that things should be done, for the molar order. The younger boy did not ask if he could enter—he did not respect the older boy and girl, and the teacher supported his right to enter without respect for what was going on.

Teachers find themselves resolving disputes and making complex decisions on a moment-by-moment basis. When this teacher joined the situation it appeared that the four-year-old boy was in the wrong, violently excluding the younger boy, not listening to the younger boy’s desire to be part of this bandy-assemblage. He was, in this moment, not in a smooth space where his position could be made to make sense. His outrage at the smaller boy’s intrusion could not be accommodated in the striations of the preschool context. In this particular preschool, however, listening on the part of teachers is highly valued, and when I described the event to them, as I had seen it, as I had listened to it, they were troubled. They wanted to think about what happened not just in terms of predictable striations or rationalities (he must learn to share, children should be nice to each other) but in order to listen and to open up something new. As Foucault says:

Thought... is what allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its
conditions and its goals. Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the
motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and
reflects on it as a problem. (1997b: 117)

The default position of the categorical difference between teachers and children had
rapidly asserted itself in the name of care and safety, making listening in that moment
impossible. But because these teachers regularly meet and reflect with each other and
with observers, the moment can be examined. It can be productive of new thought. An
evolutionary process of selves-in-relation can take up the event and work with it. The
capacity to listen, and to go on listening is not ever accomplished once and for all. It
must be wrestled with, lost, found again. Openness to the future can never be
guaranteed. It can close itself off like an egg, impervious to the outside. But
Once we start talking
Stories spill out
Lap over each other
Wash us into other stories. (Gannon in Davies and Gannon, 2006: 117)

We open ourselves up to listening, to differenciation, to becoming other, to becoming in
relation to the other, ears no longer blocked, eyes no longer sealed over. The drops of
blood on Shane’s wrist become vivid evidence of his pain; the joy of the rhythmic sound
of the ball, and the song of the triangle, take us toward a new pedagogy with listening at
its heart.

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