The Meaning(s) of (Human) Value in Arts Based Education

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Overview

• The project
• Education Context in England
• Meaning(s) of (human) value in arts-based education
• New materialism as a theoretical frame
• Moments of Wonder
• (Human) Value & Education
The Project

• Arts-based education project led by Purple Patch Arts (purplepatch.org)
• Aim of supporting English, Maths and Science for children with ‘complex needs’
• Three ‘special’ schools in north of England
• Six week programme
The Education Context

• Turn to the market for solution for educational problems (Apple, 2001)
• Schools in competition to recruit the ‘best’ students
• Schools are measured by pupils’ outcomes & this is published in ‘league tables’
• Special schools (for disabled children) not exempt
• Education constructs narrow versions of human value – which exclude disabled children (and others)
• Arts based practitioners are increasingly required to produce ‘objective’ measures to assess the impact of their work on students’ learning
• What political and pedagogical questions emerge when school curricula are opened up through arts-based learning?
Drawing on a new materialist framework

• ‘New materialist’ approaches in education, which seek to de-centre from the human, and to pay attention to a host of things within an assemblage (Taylor & Ivinson, 2013)

• The classroom becomes the classroom-as-assemblage, one that is made up of bodies, sensations, sounds, smells, and materials (Osgood, 2014).
Shifts in understanding

• De-centering the human and seeing humans and all other things as abstract entities that can only be understood in relation to one another

• Replace the traditional understandings of human agency with the notion of affect, that is, the capacity to affect or be affected; no single element (human or non-human) possesses agency (Fox and Alldred, 2015).
A new analysis: wonder

• “wonder is relational. It is not clear where it originates and to whom it belongs. It seems to be “out there,” emanating from a particular object, image, or fragment of text; but it is also “in” the person that is affected. A passion: the capacity to affect and to be affected. When I feel wonder, I have chosen something that has chosen me, and it is that mutual “affection” that constitutes “us” as, respectively, data and researcher.”

• McClure (2013: 229)
Three moments of wonder ...
The poetry: Sylvia Plath *Crossing the Water* (1962)
The slime
The toilet putty
And so ....

• New materialism shifts the focus upon moments of intra-action, and collective learning facilitated through engagement with arts-based practice in schools;

• The ‘value of arts-based practice’ is revealed through these moments of intra-actions and connections;

• Learning is revealed as a collective (not individual) endeavour involving human and non-human actors;

• Arts-based practice is, perhaps, uniquely placed to promote learning at level of the collective, rather than the individual, in education, and may open up radical alternatives for understanding the (human) value of education for children for all children.