

**Book Review**

# Mothering a Bodied Curriculum: Emplacement, Desire, Affect

Stephanie Springgay & Debra Freedman, editors  
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012

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*Mothering a Bodied Curriculum* is an edited book that challenges the established discourses of motherhood, embodiment, and curriculum and pursues the argument for a relational and ethical being with the *other*. This publication is both philosophical and practical and carefully crafts the relationship between the public and private as the authors unveil their rigorously theorized narratives. This is not the first attempt of the editors to rethink and reconceptualize the bodied nature of education; *Mothering a Bodied Curriculum* is a very mature and pleasurable *bodied* experience indeed. From the first chapter to the post scriptum, readers are drawn into mothering, body, and curriculum in chapters that work with the ideas of thinkers and philosophers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Patti Lather, Rosi Braidotti, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari. This edited book is original both in its topic and execution, as the editors have taken a very creative approach to the problem of how to construct and produce a book on this challenging and cutting edge topic. The combination of *mothering* and *curriculum*, and mothering a bodied curriculum is an unexpected but well-selected and performed theme. The individual papers are strong, diverse, and tight and clearly highlight the experience and problem of the dominance of certain discourses. The chapters in a very personal and narrative way rupture binaries and assumptions, and through carefully crafted arguments and freshly theorized experiences, they challenge the dominant established arguments. As the editors argue, “[our aim] is not to reinscribe additional postmodern and/or post-structuralist ideas about the mother; rather, we turn to Rosi Braidotti’s . . . feminist materialist theories of the body to engender an unworking of curriculum theory as mothering” (p. 6).

The disruption of Cartesian dualisms, the reconceptualization of body and mothering, and the rethinking of the traditional theories are some of the experiences that a reader of this book will encounter. Creating the rupture in the dominant discourses and established thinking connects the dots in the chapters of this book. The editors aim to work with theories and approaches such as post-reconceptualization of curriculum studies and post-foundational and post-feminist methodologies. However, throughout the chapters, these are more performed than actually explored and critiqued. In the center of this publication is Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of *becoming minor*, and the editors understand this as moving from “discursive significations and representations, to assemblages of events and actions that are constituted in relations, and thus mothering and curriculum theory are capable of being considered performative” (p. 7). Resisting, disrupting, disturbing, rupturing, and re-inscribing are the features of each chapter in

this book. As the editors argue, this collection “engenders a way of thinking about curriculum theory as mothering that makes possible new theories and actualisations of the body” (p. 10). This book thus weaves philosophy, personal narrative, theory, and curriculum and performs it in a fresh and an unexpected way.

The idea of a bodied curriculum relates more to the relational, social, and ethical implications of otherness and being other/being with other/being against other. These are the powerful and often unspoken knowledges: bodily knowledges and encounters and interactions of bodies. An original and creative play with mothering as *m/othering* implicates, for example, the Deleuzian *minor* and a range of positions toward ethics and otherness. Instead of a Cartesian split into mother and other, this book inscribes a less discursive and more relational position of m/other. The notion of performativity as an embodied expectation is something that binds the arguments of the chapters together. The act of m/othering is incomplete, in the constant state of becoming, and in the ethical encounter and negotiation, where nothing is static or passive. However, m/othering finds itself in the constant flux of being active and incomplete, not definable and indeterminable, but fragile and vulnerable. The m/othering as relational does not require protection or sympathy; it requires the rethinking and reimagining of the boundaries and the core of the ideas and thoughts of what makes up the ruling hegemony of everyday encounters.

At the core of this book are four research questions: (1) What are the intersections between curriculum studies and the maternal embodied subject? (2) How do the experiences that attend to the practice of mothering challenge conventional ways of knowing, teaching, and learning? (3) How does the maternal standpoint interact with the other raced, sexed, classed, and disabled identities? and (4) What happens when mothers refuse to become the Other? (p. 7).

These questions are central to the enquiry throughout this edited book, prompting a serious rethinking of *minor methodology*. The book itself is divided into three sections: emplacement, desire, and affect. Emplacement is concerned with the interconnectedness of body, mind, and space. The chapters in this section are not necessarily troubled with the localizing of the body but are more concerned with the relationship between the body and space/place/environment. Mothering becomes a series of lived and situated practices that resist the binary of a Cartesian model. However, the chapters do not treat these as oppositional binaries. They work with this experience and perform its existence. As Maudlin argues in the chapter *Pregnant Pedagogy*, the idea is to make public space more relational toward the private space and to “make the marginalizing, categorizing, alienating, dehumanizing institution that public education has become into something generative, liberating, meaningful, and promising” (p. 48). The second section, which is focused on desire, argues for relationships, entanglements, and the assemblages of bodies. This section “re-figures the notions of mothering and curriculum theory as creative, proliferating, and unpredictable events” (p. 10). The contributors of this section construct stories of resistance and relational experiences of a bodied curriculum. Desire is performed as a relationship between the personal and philosophical, often through a theorized narrative.

The third and final section is concerned with affect. In this section, the papers “examine the importance of affect in the production of knowledge, arguing that both mothering and curriculum need to attend to the smelliness, the repulsions, and the feelings of overwhelming joy that events produce” (p. 10). Affect is proposed as a relational embodied experience, arising as other bodies shape and affect our own bodies. In this sense, for example, Stille, in her essay, argues:

Family violence has a context, and needs to be understood as within and relating to social experience. Bringing stories like mine into the discourse, I invite the merging and blurring of the public and the domestic, the fact and the fiction, and the ethical responsibilities of mothering and teaching other people's children. (p. 318)

Affect acts as a performative embodiment of this collection and is a well-placed final section for this book, complementing the prior sections of emplacement and desire.

Overall, there is really nothing expected or traditional about *Mothering a Bodied Curriculum: Emplacement, Desire, Affect*. These are not expected stories and journeys but they are powerful philosophical theorizations that trouble, disrupt, and recreate an anomaly of difference. This book creates spatial, relational, bodied, and affective relations through careful and thorough theorizing. It disrupts normality, everydayness, and greyness, not through the binary but through the relational and the mothering of a bodied curriculum. These are theoretically sound yet challenging chapters and they mean to question established thinking about curriculum and mothering. Therefore, this edited book is a serious and original work that disrupts normalcy. It is an important and essential publication that performs resistance and challenges established ways of thinking. The sections are well-written and masterfully edited, and like pieces of a puzzle, the story comes together in a well-written afterword that serves both as an overview and a review of this book, albeit one might miss a chapter that critiques these important perspectives and methodologies. It is clear, however, that this is not the final word on this topic, because no doubt, such work will emerge in the near future. The physical book is bodily exciting, smelly, and touchable. Indeed, one can feel the relational bodies in operation that give full legitimacy to the bodied curriculum. The contributor's stories perform the mothering of a bodied curriculum. As Eisenhower says in her contribution: "Tell her story honestly, but gently, as a mother would" (p. 234).

### Reference

Springgay, S., & Freedman, D. (Eds.) (2012). *Mothering a bodied curriculum: Emplacement, desire, affect*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

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