Tact and the Pedagogical Triangle: Mindfulness for Teachers in Relation

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> *We must finally have the courage… to open up and keep open the realm of the natural, the unintentional and the involuntary. This is of special importance since this domain is obscured by the means-ends thinking of our time that stops at nothing—with neither the school nor educational theory standing in its way.* –Jakob Muth (1962)

Teachers around the world are now commonly subject to standards defining their role and activity in terms of the effective application of the most efficient teaching methods, in terms of optimizing inputs and outputs, means and ends. Measures of student learning and competencies, of the "value" that can be "added" by teachers to student test scores have become the currency for educators and administrators alike. Little room is left, it seems, for the unintentional and involuntary, for student individuality and autonomy—for anything outside of the quantifiable ends and the presented means for their attainment. For example, besides tying teacher remuneration to student outcomes, the US No Child Left Behind policy mandates "scientifically based" instructional strategies—ones that tightly script lessons in ways that exclude teacher and student spontaneity.

It is difficult to image anything more alien to the motivations and beliefs that lead students to join the teaching profession in the first place—and to the values that sustain the commitment of experienced teachers. From Boise to Brunei, from Leuven to Santiago, the desires and values of student-teachers appear remarkably similar. They are to work with and help children and young people, to change society for the better, and to enjoy the rewards of teaching itself.[1] These morally-charged personal convictions have too often been observed to run aground of scientific performance benchmarks, prescriptive instructional strategies, and the measures of teaching efficiency and effectiveness that dominate education today. The result is what some have called an epidemic of teacher burnout—with burnout defined as personal and professional collapse caused by stress and overwork (e.g., see: Montgomery & Rupp 2005 and Aloe et al 2014 for recent meta-analyses; see also Gavish & Friedman 2010; Dworkin & Tobe 2014). But as Santoro (2011) maintains, it is arguably not so much that "individual teachers' *personal* resources cannot meet the challenge" of their profession, but that teachers feel deprived *professionally*. And this can be regarded, she further maintains not as of teacher burnout but of *demoralization*—a deprivation of moral meaning and purpose. Santoro explains: The "problem lies in their gradual inability to access the moral rewards of teaching; it can lead to feeling depressed, discouraged, shameful, and hopeless" (19; emphasis added).

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[1] This characterization reflects findings from a variety of experiential and academic sources: Brunei is covered in Yong (1995); we have surveyed classes of student-teachers (informally in the context of guest lectures) at the Katholieke Universiteit about their motivations for teaching, and are familiar with teacher education and teacher educators in both Boise and Santiago. See also: Kyriacou, Hultgren & Stephens 1999; Han & Yin 2016.

How can novice teachers sustain themselves—and be sustained—under these conditions? Is it possible to hold on to the conviction and inspiration that originally led them to become teachers? This article responds to these questions by exploring the relational phenomenon of pedagogical *tact*. It examines manifestations of tact through an example of one teacher working with a class of black boys at a middle school in inner-city Detroit. It studies the actions and interactions of teacher and student(s) in relation to a grammar lesson on the construction and analysis of "complex sentences." This paper does so in order to address the conflict between the moral and interpersonal grounding of teacher engagement on the one hand, and technocratic impersonal lessons, outputs and pedagogies on the other. We present tact and the pedagogical triangle, in other words, as means by which teacher candidates might navigate between the means-ends thinking embodied in standardized teaching and testing on the one hand, and the dangers of unsustainable demoralization on the other. Pedagogical tact, and its exercise within what is referred to as pedagogical triangle, can accomplish this, we believe, by addressing one of the moments where teacher candidates feel abandoned by their teacher training: In those situations for which there are no ready prescriptions, which *are* not, and indeed cannot, been anticipated in the methods and techniques provided for them before their entry into the field. In the light of our topic, the 1962 quote from Jakob Muth above shows that our concerns are not new. In fact, our paper uses Muth's 1962 classic on pedagogical "tact-in-action" (*Pädagogischer Takt*[2]) as an interpretive guide; indeed, it can be seen as an overview of a number of Muth's key points through the close "reading" and interpretation of an illustrative video clip.

Frame of Reference: Tact and the Pedagogical Triangle

This article was developed through the convergence of two quite different approaches to a common question for research. This is the question of the ethical or normative nature of the teaching, as manifest in everyday classroom activity. The first approach comes from the German traditions of *Pädagogik* and *Didaktik*, and is covered throughout the paper. Although less overt in the paper, the second approach is no less significant. It comes from recent American research into character education and specifically *teacher manner*. Drawing from Aristotelian sources, "teacher manner" has been defined "as action consistent with one or more relatively stable dispositions or traits of character" (Richardson & Fenstermacher 2001, 631). Although tact or tactfulness are generally defined (here and elsewhere) as in terms of situated interaction rather than subsisting in one's *character*, there are many points of similarity and shared emphasis between these two approaches. These include a common emphasis on the personal nature of the relationship between the student and the teacher, the problematic nature of theory (moral or otherwise) for pedagogical practice, and above all, an affirmation of the unavoidably ethical nature of commonplace teacher action and interaction (e.g., see: Richardson & Fallona 2001; Fenstermacher 2001). Ethics in this case is not a matter of teaching students right and wrong, but of seeing's one own engagement with and responsibility to one's students in these terms. Also important is the fact that video

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[2] The full title of this book is: *Pädagogischer Takt: Monographie einer aktuellen Form erzieherischen und didaktischen Handelns,* "Pedagogical Tact: Study of a contemporary form of educational and instructional action." Parts of this book are currently being co-translated by this article's first author.

data collected originally for the "Manner in Teaching Project" led by Virginia Richardson and Gary Fenstermacher has been adapted for the purposes of this study, as explained below.

Tact was first introduced to pedagogical discourse over 200 years ago by Johann Friedrich Herbart, a scholar in education and philosophy. Herbart speaks of tact briefly in the context of a lecture to his own student-teachers on theory and practice in teaching, describing it as "quick judgment and decision, not proceeding like routine, eternally uniform, but [adapting to] …the true requirements of the individual case" (1896, p. 20). Over 150 years later, Jakob Muth significantly expanded on Herbart's references to tact, in part by analyzing this phenomenon through the lens of the "pedagogical triangle," as mentioned above. It emerges from these and other analyses as the ability to do "the right thing" when there is no obvious or prescribed "right thing" to do.

To understand tact in a specifically *pedagogical* way, it is first important to understand the relations of the student, teacher and content as configured in the context of what has already been referred to as the pedagogical triangle. Simply put, the pedagogical triangle is an elementary, heuristic structure that can be used to highlight and analyze the specific interrelationships of *teacher*, *student* and *content* (e.g., student lessons, exercises and projects) in a given *pedagogical situation*.[3] In Muth's and others' accounts, each element in the pedagogical triangle is connected to another in multiple senses. In other words, the lines forming the triangle in figure 1 represent the practical interaction of all three elements, but they can also represent the attention, intention and concern of the student, and particularly of the teacher. Each of the three solid lines or connections delimiting this triangle brings with it a different emphasis: Student and content are linked through learning, study and work; teacher and content are linked both through preparation and instruction. The student and teacher, finally, are connected through the much-studied student-teacher relationship, or what is known in the German context as the "pedagogical relation" (see: Friesen, in press). In its most elementary form, the pedagogical triangle can be readily identified in the widest range of pedagogical situations, including in snapshots of everyday pedagogical interactions (figure 2).

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[3] We trace the development of what is known in the original German of Muth and Herbart as the *didaktik* triangle, with *Didaktik* referring to the study and practice of teaching and learning. At the same time we acknowledge that variations of this triangular configuration have appeared—apparently independently from the German tradition—in the work of Maggie Lampert on mathematics instruction (2001) and elsewhere (e.g., Anderson, 2003). In addition, we recognize the narrow and often pejorative significance of the term "didactic" in English, in comparison with the rich breadth of *Didaktik* in German research and practice. Consequently, this triangle is referred to here as the "pedagogical triangle" (figure 1). In choosing this name, we follow the example of Jean Houssaye who knowingly adapted this construct from the Herbartian tradition, and termed it the "*triangle pédagogique*" in French (1992).
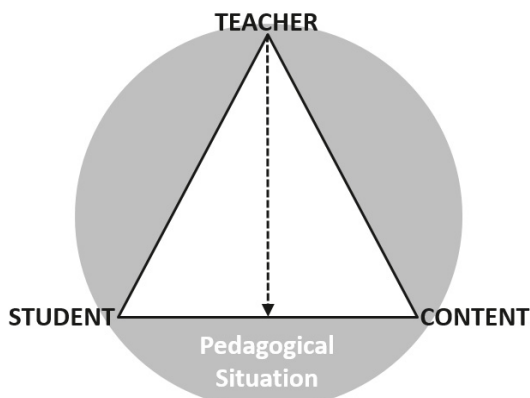
(Figure 1) The pedagogical triangle consists of:
1. Triangle outline: Teacher-student-content in relation.
2. Circle: The pedagogical situation.
3. Vertical, dashed line: The influence exercised by the teacher on the student-content relation, or: how the teacher relates *to* the student *through* the content (see fig. 2).

(Figure 2) The pedagogical triangle in a concrete teaching and learning situation. This example illustrates all of the triangle's essential elements: The teacher points and looks at the instructional content (on the computer screen); the student's attention appears to be shifting between the screen (student-content) and the teacher (student-teacher). The teacher, in leaning in and literally intervening between the student and the content (note the position of her hands), the teacher can be seen as mediating the student's relation to this content, or to be relating to the student via the content. (Original photo courtesy of the US Dept. of Education).

The idea of the pedagogical triangle, like work on teacher manner mentioned above, draws on Aristotelian sources. Specifically, it is derived from the conception of rhetoric and the rhetorical triangle presented in Aristotle's *Poetics* (Zierer & Seel 2012, 5). In an explanation that sounds remarkably like Herbart on tact, Aristotle defines rhetoric "as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (Aristotle 1924). Pedagogically tactful action, for its part, can be described as the ability to see and make use of what is available in a given situation for ends that are specifically *pedagogical*—that are for the good of the student *and* for his or her learning. As students of communication and composition will recall, the rhetorical triangle defines the interdependent relationship of the speaker (or *ethos*), the audience (*pathos*) and the message (*logos*). Ethos, first of all, refers to the character demonstrated by the speaker—the person who is working through his or her words (*logos*) to affect the thoughts and feelings (*pathos*) of the audience (Roskelly 2006). In the pedagogical context, it is the ethical *character* of teacher's actions in relation to the child or student and what he or she is to learn that are paramount. In the rhetorical situation, on the other hand, it is *pathos*, the feeling of the audience, that the speaker seeks to pathically affect that is important. Going back to the pedagogical triangle, it is the pathos of the child or student, his or her ability, congeniality and confidence and that the teacher is to sense and affect.

Comparing the rhetorical and pedagogical situations further, one could say that standing too close to a student or being too insistent about student success can have just a jarring and unpleasant effect as a speaker telling jokes at a funeral. And both, it should be noted, are problematic in specifically *contextual*

and *ethical* terms, in terms of the speaker's or teacher's character or *ethos,* rather than in terms of context-free causality or efficiency. We don't ask whether inappropriate jokes at a funeral were actually funny or not, just as parents might not initially wonder whether their child heard more clearly or worked more quickly when the teacher was invading their space. In both the rhetorical and pedagogical triangles, all three elements are always in play, even if the actions of only one or two of these points are all that is immediately apparent. Finally, just as the speaker is always communicating to a *particular* audience, a teacher never simply gives a lesson; it is always a lesson for *particular* students in a *particular* context.

As it is used both here and in other studies, the pedagogical triangle does not provide any predictive or causal insight; its visibility in an instructional context does not mean that "good" or "effective" teaching or learning is necessarily taking place. This triangle also is not as structure or technique for manipulation in the now-familiar sense of the psychological "triangulation." Rather, as we show in our interpretation and discussion, what *is* important is keeping all three elements in play and in a kind of "tension" through tactful words and actions. The student (and his or her worth) always needs to be distinguished from curricular content and its demands, just as the student-teacher relation is not something that exists entirely for its own sake, but always—either implicitly or explicitly—in relation to the scholastic tasks at hand. Finally, like tact, the relations of the pedagogical triangle are not necessarily constituted through overt action or interaction. Identifying relation and connection in this triangle can be just as much a matter of looking for what the teacher (or student) is *not* saying or doing, rather than of the analysis of overt action.

Returning briefly to Herbart's original definition of pedagogical tact, it is important to note that the role of tact in the relation of theory and practice is not just a question of putting explicit instruction into corresponding action. Teaching cannot proceed mindlessly or mechanically based on the abstract principles of psychology, classroom instruction or management, or even pre-existing moral theory. Students and the conditions of the classroom demand flexibility and improvisation, and no amount of planning and strategy development can prevent this. Indeed, as Herbart himself has put it, if a teacher "has anticipatingly indulged in extensive plans, practical circumstances will mock him" (p. 21). One could say that a gap always opens up between the best-laid plans on the one hand, and myriad classroom details and demands on the other. It is this gap according to Herbart where the "quick judgment and decision" of tact "involuntarily inserts itself"—forming "a link intermediate between theory and practice." "Pedagogical tact," Herbart continues, comes to occupy "the place" of moment-by-moment decision-making "that theory leaves vacant, and so becomes the immediate director of our practice" (20).

In thus linking theory and practice, tact as adaptive and improvised action can neither be said to be entirely practical nor entirely theoretical in nature. It is sometimes said to be based more on *pathos* or feeling than on the intellect or cognition. Indeed, tact can be said to have a distinctly *pathic* quality. To quickly sense or know "the right thing" means to rely on knowledge or sense that is implicit, pathic or emotional, rather than explicit and rule-bound. Appropriate responses in these situations are "sensed or felt, rather than thought," as Max van Manen—one of the few to have published on tact in English—explains. Quoting

philosopher Eugene Gendlin, van Manen continues by saying that tactful understanding "may not even be sensed or felt directly with attention" (E. Gendlin, as quoted in van Manen, 2015, 268). In studying a phenomenon like tact, it can consequently be helpful "to employ noncognitive as well as cognitive methods in order to address pathic experience," van Manen concludes (2011, n.p.).

Method and Data

Tact is thus neither purely abstract theory nor just habitual, routine practice; it is defined by the fact that it evades theorization and generalizable findings and principles. It is also neither overtly cognitive nor even necessarily *directly* sensed or felt. Instead, as Muth and van Manen after him make clear, it is a phenomenon that is manifest or "shows itself" in different types of action and interaction.[4] This means that methods focusing on cognition and theory, such as think-aloud protocols or grounded theory would be epistemologically inappropriate to its study. Something similar can also be said about methods that would ask teachers or students *about* their actions and interactions: Tact, after all, shows itself through word and action, not so much through the language and thinking that might, through reflection, be applied to these *post facto*. Consequently, specific, contextualized, moment-by-moment examples of words and activity, and of silence and passivity that can be *observed, described* and optimally also *reviewed* by readers and other researchers arguably constitute the unit of analysis most suited to the study of pedagogical tact. Sometimes referred to as "events" (Derry et al, 2006), these examples are provided for observation, analysis and review in this study through video recording. Similar recordings have also been analyzed in multiple German-language studies of the relational phenomenon of tact (e.g., Nolda 2015; Althans 2015). A crucial component in this video research and analysis is known as "researcher interest:" the issue, concern or frame of reference of the researcher and videographer's that inform both the recording and the analysis of the audio-visual data (Derry et al, 2006). In this study, this interest, of course, is provided by the way that pedagogical tact might "show itself" in interaction, and is further defined by the framework of the pedagogical triangle and the larger pedagogical situation within which this interaction is seen to take place.

In support of our (tacit) hypothesis that the pedagogical triangle and pedagogical tact are commonplace and everyday in their appearance, the sampling process undertaken for this study was almost entirely random. It involved the chance selection of just over 10 minutes of footage from an enormous, pre-existing corpus of well over 1000 minutes of video on over 40 digital video tape cartridges. These videos were originally taped using a single camera following the teacher's instructional action and interaction with students *in situ*. Through their extended presence in the classroom, the camera personnel and their work are hardly attended to by the teacher and her students (although the teacher does mention it once in passing in the segment analyzed). In selecting a segment for closer analysis, one of these recordings was

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[4] Muth (1962) and later van Manen (1991) speak of tact "showing itself" through various teacher actions and other relational phenomena. For example, both speak of tact "showing itself" through "as holding back," as "situational confidence" and as "improvisational gift."

played at random, with the interests of the researchers—our concern with potentially tactful teacher-student-content interaction—playing a role only in the selection of 10:37 minutes from only the first 15 minutes that we initially viewed. (Of course, researcher interest is otherwise openly evident in the interpretation of this 10:37 of data.) From this longer segment, a 1.5 minute sequence featuring an extended and difficult interaction at the blackboard between the teacher and student(s) was selected for "micro analysis" (e.g., see: Pea et al 2006). This 1.30 minute "event" (from timecode 08.15 to 09.45) was transcribed and stills were extracted for further analysis and illustration (see figures 3 to 11). The remainder of the 10.30 minute recording offers a broader concrete pedagogical situation or context for this more specific sequence, and it is analyzed and summarized on a "macro-level," in narrative form (Goldman et al 2007).

As mentioned earlier, the video data analyzed here is from an all-boy's middle-school classroom in inner-city Detroit, with the instructional focus being complex sentences. The recording begins with the teacher asking and offering hints for a definition or explanation of the complex sentence. The teacher engages in further question and answer on this subject with her students, eliciting for example its two parts: the independent and dependent clauses, and the fact that the dependent clause begins with a conjunction. She asks the students to come up with examples of these conjunctions or key words, and their answers include "as if," "whereas," "because," "since," and "so that." She undertakes all of this from her desk, projecting her voice and gesturing (fig. 3). She then points to a number of sentences on the blackboard at the far end of the classroom saying that this will now be their focus. She asks two students to draw a line under two different subordinate clauses, and they do so relatively quickly. Moving through the class towards the blackboard, she emphasizes how easy it is to find conjunctions in the examples and to thus identify the dependent clause: "And… and… and what is it that makes it easy? Study. Yes. … But what, what… The who? The con-JUNC-tion!" The "event" analyzed on a micro level in this article is transcribed below, and begins with the teacher standing at the board:

> Teacher: "Who do I call next?"
> Students: "Martin!" "Me" "Nobody." "Martin." (etc.)
> [Martin is chosen.]
> Teacher (quietly): "C'mon now. Go Martin."
> [Martin comes up to the blackboard and hesitates (fig. 5). He begins to underline the wrong word.]
> Teacher (to the class): "Woahoahohoa!" (fig. 6; see also fig. 6)
> [Martin stops his underlining.]
> Students: "Can I help him?" "Can I help him?" "I wanna help him." "Can I help him?" (etc.)
> Teacher: "Michael will come here and help."
> Teacher (turning to Martin): "Almost Martin, almost. Al-Most."
> [Michael comes, the teacher steps back and makes an inaudible aside.]
> Teacher: "Here we go… Al-most Al-most! We need some help. Need some help."
> [Ridley, a third student, comes up to the board (fig. 8)]

Teacher: "Can you do it? It's 5 letters."

[Teacher still remains at a distance, and the board is hidden behind the students.]

[After a few seconds, the teacher looks at the class and smiles broadly (figure 9).]

Teacher: "That's it!"

[Teacher steps closer to students at the board, and puts her hands on the shoulders of Martin and Ridley, as the students slowly head back to their seats (fig. 10). Ridley looks pleased, but Martin appears discouraged (figure 11).]

Teacher: "Not a problem, once you see the key word."

Figure 3: Immediately prior to the segment transcribed, the teacher announces: "I have examples on the board."

Figure 4: The teacher walks through the class to the board. "But what is it that makes it easy? […] The con-JUNCTion!"

Figure 5: Martin comes up, hesitates and tentatively underlines incorrect word. The relative positions of student, teacher and content form a triangle.

Figure 6: Teacher responds: "Woahoahohoaaa Woah! […] Almost, Martin, al-most."

Figure 7: Michael comes up to the board.

Figure 8: The teacher steps further back, saying: "We need some help." Ridley comes up to the board

Figure 9: with Ridley's correct answer, teacher looks to the class and smiles broadly.

Figure 10: teacher puts her hand on Ridley's and Martin's shoulders. "That's it!"

Figure 11: Scattered applause as Martin returns to his seat gesturing unhappily.

Interpretation and Discussion

Tact as Manifest between Teacher and Student
In first focusing on the student-teacher relation in the pedagogical triangle, we examine the teacher's engagement with Martin, which is at once the lengthiest student-teacher interaction in the 10.5 min. clip and also the most complex. As Martin arrives at the board, we can readily superimpose the pedagogical triangle on the relative positions of the teacher student and content (fig. 5). Martin is working with a sentence written on it. The teacher stands close to and slightly behind Martin, and is engaged with him in terms of his work with this content. The literal distance between student and teacher increase slightly when the other students join Martin at the board, leading her to step back. Otherwise, over the course of the 10.5 minutes covered in our macro-analysis, the teacher's proximity to Martin and the other students otherwise varies greatly. At first, she is seated, with her desk separating her from her students, and later, she walks through the seated students, and then stands at what appears to be a carefully modulated distance from those working at the board. Finally, one could say that this physical distance effectively decreases to zero when the teacher briefly places her hands on Martin's and Ridley's shoulders

The physical distance that is either increased or decreased at each of these points is significant, but in our analysis, our primary focus on another type of distance: This is a kind of instructional or pedagogical distance that is often expressed by the teacher in terms of what she does *not* do: For example, even when two or three students are attempting to parse the sentence originally undertaken by Martin, the teacher does not intervene. Instead, she remains behind them and to one side—although she could easily reach out and point out the conjunction herself. Her words, actions and position all direct the students' attention and efforts to the content or problem at hand without giving away its solution. Also, her refusal to intervene and help seems to be the expectation or norm in the classroom, given the students' readiness to step in and help each other. But what kind of distance and refusal is this, and why it might be important?

Jacob Muth explains that the figurative distance maintained in pedagogical tact is quite different from the distance a teacher might keep from his or her peers. It is different, for example, from tactfully *not* saying exactly what's on your mind to a friend at a given moment. Muth points out that we often maintain a general, interpersonal tact and reticence for our *own* sake, and he refers to this as *distance*. However, the distantiation maintained by the teacher in specifically *pedagogical* tact is emphatically *not* for his or her own sake, but is exercised only for that of the *student*. It is identified by Muth as *reserve*:

> Through *distance*, the person attempts to protect himself, for example the teacher tries to protect his or her own being as a teacher. *Reserve*, on the other hand, is always exercised for the sake of another. […] As such, it is maintained for the sake of the child… as opposed to the isolating distance that is often exercised in life in general. It preserves the correct middle-point between the educative help of the teacher and the possible self-help of the child. (Muth 1967, 55; emphases added)

Examples of this pedagogical reserve are not difficult to identify and imagine. For example, a teacher might sense that it is better *not* to interrupt the focused concentration or the lively discussion unfolding in his or her classroom. Or under different circumstances, the same teacher might chose *not* to continue a lesson or an attempt at generating a focused discussion if that same class appears stressed or fatigued. Referencing Herbart, these and similar cases can all be said to rely on "quick judgment and decision" in response to the true requirements "of the individual case." Significantly, Muth puts this final point in a slightly different way, suggesting that a central challenge is to balance the tensions of the pedagogical triangle, to maintain "the correct middle-point" between the teacher's assistance and "the possible self-help of the child" (36).

 "The reason for the reserve of the teacher," as pedagogue Werner Loch explains, is thus "the facilitation" not simply of the *learning* of the student, but "of his or her 'self-activity'" (as quoted in Muth 1962, 36). This "self-activity" of the student is *not* defined in the German tradition in instrumental terms or in terms of a predetermined goal or end to reach and the means to attain it—as something, for example, to "scaffold" or facilitate. Instead, it is seen in ethical terms as the independent activity of the student or child that is significant insofar as it expresses his or her personality and prefigures his or her adult autonomy and responsibility.[5] The teacher's reserve, moreover, is to be carefully modulated according to *this* child's activity and personality—in terms of his singularity and that of his situation: "It is in the *appropriate* distance for singularity of a situation and the uniqueness of a child in the pedagogical relation that pedagogical tact can be measured," as Muth puts it (49; emphasis added). Who the student is, his or her feelings and subjective experiences, life history, even what is known about his or her home and family life, are all a part of this singularity.

But can we say that the teacher's words and actions in the video segment are *actually* attuned to Martin's individuality and situation as well as his (potentially) independent activity? Can the teacher's actions described above be said to be unequivocally tactful, given Martin's obvious disappointment at the end? Teachers are sometimes advised to allow students to succeed publically, but to fail in private. However, in the context of the non-routinized "quick judgment and decision" of tact, the validity of this rule or convention is not guaranteed or unproblematically assured. Neither pedagogical tact nor the heuristic of the pedagogical triangle can point the way to what is unambiguously "right" or "wrong" in teacher action—or to what is *certain* to be either "tactful" or "tactless" in terms of the outcome of any given situation. Instead, tact and the pedagogical triangle can provide us and others concerned about students' lives and wellbeing with ways of understanding, evaluating and learning about the ethical and relational implications of our own pedagogical engagement. They can also provide ways of recognizing the ultimate

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[5] This term "self-activity" is also used by Dewey, who defines it as follows: "the instinctive, impulsive attitudes and activities of the child… [the] numberless spontaneous activities of children, plays, games, mimic efforts… [which ultimately form] the foundation-stones of educational method" (1915, 112). See also Friesen 2014, xxxvii-xliv.

undecidability of many pedagogical moments and situations and their apparent consequences. For example, it might be the case that Martin's experience of disappointment is acute, only adding to those problems already weighing upon him. Alternatively, it may be that he'll simply forget about it with the next activity or the next class.

At the same time the teacher's act of touching Martin on the shoulder can be seen as a fairly decisive act, regardless of the depth of his disappointment. In effectively reducing the (literal) distance between Martin and herself to zero in this way, the teacher can be seen as directly intervening between his "learning" relationship to the content and its demands, and as asserting the primacy of the student-teacher over that of either the student or teacher to the content. However, this intervention can only be momentary; to sustain it for any longer, as some might be seen as advocating, would be to disrupt the delicate balance of the pedagogical triangle, and to turn the teacher into a care-giving parent or nurse rather than a pedagogue who is always concerned with the content and the task at hand as well.

As a sense of discernment of the right thing to do for the student's well-being—for his or her present experience and for his or her future—tact cannot assure or guarantee any one particular or desirable outcome. Regardless, tact is something that is exercised numerous times in the 10 minutes of teacher action and interaction analyzed here. This ranges from her approval of students' examples of conjunctions through to her final reminder that it is "not a problem, once you see the key word." Even the most sophisticated psychometrics or neuro-analyses, of course, can never provide certainty about what to do in a particular pedagogical situation—even though, unlike tact, these scientific methods might lead us to believe they *can* provide such certainty. Tact and the pedagogical triangle instead can help comprehend and refine the possibilities and limitations of our own abilities to speak and act—and also to understand and reflect—not only in the interests of the well-being of the student but also the demands of curricular content and learning, which is our next concern.

Tact as Manifest between Teacher and Content
In addition to maintaining the balance between student and teacher, there is a second delicate and complex equilibrium that is to be preserved in tactful teaching, one exercised in relation to the content, the subject matter or the task at hand. As with the teacher's relation to the student—which, as we have seen, is always interpenetrated by concerns related to subject matter—the student is also always present in the teacher's relation to the content. In the video, the teacher is constantly modulating her relation and position with regard to the tasks presented by complex sentences and their demands, while also seeking to affect or mediate the students' relation to these as well. She begins by discussing them verbally at her desk, underscoring the "ease" of mastering these sentences while moving through the class, and finally standing closer by as Martin and others complete the exercises on the board.

Although the teacher is certainly concerned with this content from this start, she can be observed to gradually allow it to become ever more central as the 10.5 minutes of the clip unfold. Perhaps the clearest

example of this is when she transitions from her question and answer with the class about complex sentences in general, to the specific examples on the board. At this point the subject matter is no longer simply expressed in verbal exchanges, but is provided in black and white for all to see. However, the teacher modulates her *figurative* distance to this matter in a way that is rather more controlling than her relationship with her students. She both selects the examples and exercises, and directs students' attention quite explicitly to them. Indeed, Muth goes so far as to say that

> In the final analysis it is not only the teacher who here (as one might say) "educates," but it is instead the *exercises* and *demands* that he assigns, and as whose spokesperson he appears to children. (40)

The teacher is indeed a kind of representative for the content; she sets and controls the topic and exercises, and advocates for their accessibility and simplicity. Initially, a number of students analyze these sentences, and require little time or effort for this task. Their success is affirmed and celebrated through the teacher's smiles, gestures and words: "Awww-shucks! Alll-right!" It may be fortuitous or it may be with some purpose that the first two students and examples chosen by the teacher present few difficulties, and that she is ready at the board when it is Martin's turn.

It goes without saying that for Martin himself, his performance at the board (however brief) is not a trivial matter. To fail in front of the class is not simply to miss the point about conjunctions or complex sentences; it is to live or embody failure before one's peers. Connecting questions of student academic performance and competition to pedagogical tact, Muth emphasizes that this "tact is particularly important in schoolwork" because in a sense the student "stands in this task, and makes its emergence possible." This student, Muth is saying, can be in danger of effectively *becoming* his or her task or schoolwork in the eyes of his peers, his teacher and himself, of *being* the failure that for a brief moment occurs at the board. Here, too, pedagogical tact as the careful exercise of reserve or distance is paramount. In this case, however, this reserve is exercised not only in relation to the student, but to the evaluation and demands implied in the content.

Despite determining, representing and speaking for curriculum content, the teacher must be careful maintain her own distance from it, while at the same not aligning it too closely with any one student's abilities and performance. A tactful teacher may hold back when a vulnerable student is struggling with an exceptionally difficult assignment; however, the same teacher would exercise a rather different distance when students are completing a basic quiz on assigned homework or on the previous day's lesson. Even though the teacher in the video may be mindful of the ultimate significance of the lesson for her students' up-coming test performance or their long-term academic success, she of course brings no such concerns to bear directly on her students. This lack of attention to future academic performance is despite the fact that school tests and students' longer term success are the only plausible justification for teaching a subject like complex sentences. In addition, the teacher never appears capricious in the demands she makes of

students, and she maintains the expectation that her students will ultimately succeed, at least collectively, in the task she places before them.

Muth describes the kind of reserve that these actions represent in terms of "the natural action of the teacher." In this action, Muth explains, tact is manifest in the teacher's "stepping back from the requirements that he has placed on the children… [and] in not acting consciously and willfully on the basis of the desired effects and scholastic goals" (39-40). The teacher does not confront the end or goal of her students' competency or mastery in any direct or overt way. She again exercises a kind of distance or even passivity—perhaps not so much for the sake of students' learning as for the sake of their well-being. For to do otherwise would be to again to lose the balance in the relations and tensions constitutive of the pedagogical triangle. Any one student cannot be allowed to become in effect indistinguishable from his or her abilities and performance. The teacher, for her part, also cannot allow herself to simply serve as a stand-in for the ultimate expectations of curriculum outcomes and performance measures. If either were to be the case, the two-dimensional structure of the pedagogical triangle would in a sense collapse into a one-dimensional, one-way relationship between current student deficits and expected student performance.

Thus, despite the enormous pressures placed by high-stakes testing and performance evaluations on both teacher and student, pedagogical tact requires that these be kept at bay from the pedagogical situation. Neither the student nor the teacher can simply be reduced to performance or demand. Instead the tactful teacher keeps the content and its ultimate demands at a safe distance from both her action and interaction, and from the student's own uncertainties, incremental learning and "self-help." To fail to do so in moments of student need and uncertainty would ultimately be to mirror the crudest behaviourist punishment-and-reward scenario, or to reproduce the most reductionist means-ends thinking decried by Muth at the outset of this paper. In these cases, as Muth puts it, the action of the teacher would simply "solidify into sheer *power*" (42; emphasis added).

Conclusion

With these observations about means-ends and the arbitrary exercise of teacher power, we are able to return to the questions of teachers' demoralization or alienation from the moral rewards of teaching. According to Muth, what is at stake in the reduction of pedagogy to mere means-ends rationality is nothing less than the "authenticity" of the teacher him or herself: "From the moment that I become preoccupied about the effect I want to produce on the other person, my every act, word and attitude loses its authenticity" (Muth, 42; Marcel 1951, 17). Muth here is briefly quoting from *Homo Viator* (the human way) by French existentialist Gabriel Marcel. Marcel himself continues:

> From the very fact that I treat the other person merely as a means of resonance or an amplifier, I tend to consider him as a sort of apparatus which I can, or think I can, manipulate, or of which I

can dispose at will. I form my own idea of him and, strangely enough, this idea can become a substitute for the real person, a shadow to which I shall come to refer my acts and words. (17-18)

Although Muth does not include this last passage in his book, it makes a point that is indispensable here: that the "morally-charged personal convictions" that lead students to enter the profession, and that sustain those already in it, are the source of their authenticity as teachers. What is important in this case is not the authenticity of the pedagogy or the learning that is being embraced, but of the teacher's personhood in relation to both student and content. Marcel is also suggesting that the connection to this source is jeopardized by pressures to optimize outputs and outcomes. It results not only in every "act, word and attitude" of the teacher losing its authenticity, but also in the "substitution of the real person" of the student to a mere shadow or apparatus—one which can be manipulated and disposed of at will. The scientific performance benchmarks, prescriptive instructional strategies, and means-ends thinking that dominate education today threaten to reduce both the student and teacher to the status of a "means to an end." Even when teacher-candidates are doing everything that is prescribed precisely as required—indeed maybe *because* they are doing this—they can be reducing their children to means to an end.

Muth emphasizes instead of becoming a mere tool in the service of ever greater efficiency, to be a teacher or a student actually represents ends in themselves. There is no ultimate goal for being either a teacher or a student within the pedagogical situation. Each occupies his or her role ultimately and authentically for its own sake, rather than to achieve a predetermined end or objective. It is in maintaining the distances and tensions constitutive of the pedagogical triangle, we submit, that the reduction of both teacher and student to external goals and outputs can be avoided, and the authenticity and individuality of both teacher and student can be protected and preserved.

We have thus presented the pedagogical triangle and the exercise of pedagogical tact as ways to understand how teachers might prevent their own alienation and demoralization under the pressures of the dominant instrumental culture of our era. We have done so not only to share our findings and insights with other researchers and teacher-educators, but with the hope that they might also benefit those who are about to enter the field of teaching—those whose moral convictions and grounding are likely to be most forcefully tested and challenged. Although this study is only a kind of proof-of-concept—intended as the first step in a larger effort to explore structures undergirding teachers' ethical engagement in everyday activity—we believe that tact as a notion, as a possibility for sensitive pedagogical action, can be of great value for teacher candidates.

Together with concrete examples of pedagogical situations and the use of the pedagogical triangle as a heuristic, tact gives the opportunity to see what might be tactful and certainly what would *not* be tactful. And these distinctions are indispensable precisely where there are no prescriptions for the right thing to do. Tact becomes important precisely when the limits of the instructional and management methods that student-teachers have been reached, and there is no prescription for what to do—for example, when three

students are at the board, struggling towards the right answer, or when a student's conspicuous silence or overt expression catches us unawares. Needless to say, in most classrooms, these kinds of moments present themselves many times over in the course of a teaching day. Teacher educators need to help teacher candidates understand how to balance the tensions of the pedagogical triangle—tensions that are exacerbated by a myopic focus on standardized tests and accountability, as well as scientifically-based strategies for teaching that do not attend to the unpredictable nature of the teaching situation (an unpredictability that rears its head countless times a day for teachers, especially in the early years).

Jakob Muth wrote his 1962 book on *pedagogical* tact in the conformist atmosphere of a nation actively repressing the horrors of WWII and obsessed with industrial and commercial recovery and efficiency. In this context, Muth observes that "uniformity and conformity" that reduce the individual into "an organizational category… only work against tact," and "obstruct the possibility of tactful action" (7-8). Today, similar pressures for uniformity and conformity are certainly mounting, obstructing the everyday exceptions and improvisations constitutive of tactful action. As these corrosive pressures increase, tactful teacher action is made to be not only more challenging, but at the same time, all the more vital and urgent.

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