



# Teaching Embodied: Cultural Practice in Japanese Preschools

*Akiko Hayashi, Joseph Tobin*

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When we look beyond lesson planning and curricula—those explicit facets that comprise so much of our discussion about education—we remember that teaching is an inherently social activity, shaped by a rich array of implicit habits, comportments, and ways of communicating. This is as true in the United States as it is in Japan, where Akiko Hayashi and Joseph Tobin have long studied early education from a cross-cultural perspective. Taking readers inside the classrooms of Japanese preschools, *Teaching Embodied* explores the everyday, implicit behaviors that form a crucially important—but grossly understudied—aspect of educational practice.

Akiko Hayashi and Joseph Tobin embed themselves in the classrooms of three different teachers at three different schools to examine how teachers act, think, and talk. Drawing on extended interviews, their own real-time observations, and hours of video footage, they focus on how teachers embody their lessons: how they use their hands to gesture, comfort, or discipline; how they direct their posture, gaze, or physical location to indicate degrees of attention; and how they use the tone of their voice to communicate empathy, frustration, disapproval, or enthusiasm. Comparing teachers across schools and over time, they offer an illuminating analysis of the gestures that comprise a total body language, something that, while hardly ever explicitly discussed, the teachers all share to a remarkable degree. Showcasing the tremendous importance of—and dearth of attention to—this body language, they offer a powerful new inroad into educational study and practice, a deeper understanding of how teaching actually works, no matter what culture or country it is being practiced in.

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