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Embodied Knowing: Getting Back to our Roots

Randee Lipson Lawrence (Chair), Yolanda Nieves, Celeste Snowber, Luis Kong, Gabo Ntseane

Abstract: Embodied knowing is explored as an intuitive process, through women’s stories, through dance, as community building through martial arts and through interactions with animals at an African game drive. Implications for adult education are discussed.

In recent years, conversations of various ways of knowing have taken place at AERC, yet the vast majority of research is still emerging from the cognitive intellectual paradigm. Embodied knowing is our first and most primitive way of experiencing the world. As infants, in cultures around the world we learn first through our bodies. Yet, in western culture this way of knowing is de-emphasized as we enter formal school. We are made to sit in chairs and be still. In higher education this way of knowing is all but absent. It is as if we are being educated from the neck up.

This panel challenges the dominant ideology, which privileges rationality as the primary way of knowing. We critique assumptions about the body as problematic and taboo and offer counter-narratives that reclaim the body as a way of knowing. Embodied processes such as theater and dance can serve as methods of decolonization by giving embodied voice to oppressed groups who may not be heard in other ways.

Embodied or somatic learning is the least discussed in the adult education literature among the various learning domains. For many of us, the body is source of discomfort or dis-ease. We’d much rather live in our heads. Yet the body has a wisdom of it's own. If we listen to and learn from the body it has much to teach us. In response to the dearth of literature in adult education on embodied knowing, a recent edited book (Lawrence, 2012) was published on this topic. The panelists include authors of this book, which addresses embodied learning through a variety of practice contexts and multiple modalities. We also include a perspective from Africa, which adds to the North American perspectives contained in the book as well as a focus on body movement in community building.

This symposium looks at embodied knowing from the following five positions: Intuition and embodied consciousness, embodied knowing and community engagement in the Puerto Rican community, dance as an embodied educational strategy, adult learning in community organizing through body movement and embodied knowing as a holistic process of learning in Africa encompassing human along with other living beings. The goal of this symposium is to help educators in rethinking pedagogy and opening up to consider ways of knowing and learning that are more inclusive of a variety of learning styles and cultural perspectives. In order to reach all of our learners we may need to leave the safety of our own comfort zones and tried and true ways of teaching and be willing to not only appreciate but to incorporate the body into our pedagogy.

Intuition and Embodied Consciousness

Randee Lipson Lawrence, National Louis University

Life begins at the end of your comfort zone

Neale Donald Walsch

Intuition is a way of knowing that precedes our conscious awareness. When we do become aware, we often can’t explain where the knowledge came from. We just know that we know. If we trace the path of our awareness backward to its point of origin we can see that we first felt it in our bodies. Crowdes (2000 p. 27) refers to this awareness as “conscious embodiment”. For example, in making a decision to accept a new job, after examining alternative options we often make decisions by “gut feeling”, it just feels right. Embodied

knowing is at the root of all other ways of knowing including: cognitive, affective and spiritual knowing (Lawrence, 2012). Babies and very young children learn first by exploring the world with their bodies. Affective knowledge that comes from our emotions often has a physical component. We experience fear as discomfort in the abdominal region or sadness as heaviness in our shoulders. Spiritual knowing is often accompanied by a felt sense of awe that may be experienced as tears, chills, or a sense of lightness and well being that is beyond description. Even cognitive knowledge that emerges through critical reflection (Mezirow, 2000) often comes to us in embodied ways especially as we deal with emotion-laden dilemmas.

Embodied knowledge can emerge through conscious engagement in contemplative physical activity such as yoga and tai chi, through dance, through artwork such as painting or sculpture and through individual and team sports. At times these creative and physical activities can be ways to surface hidden knowledge when words may be inadequate or even non-existent. The act of embodying difficult or painful experiences can sometimes create pathways to discuss what was formerly undiscussable. For example, dance teacher Shapiro (2002) had her students dance their experiences of women's silent voices. Embodied knowledge can also come to us in unconscious states such as dreams, visions, and meditation. Taken seriously, this knowledge can provide clues to valuable information that otherwise might remain beyond our reach.

Given the primacy of embodied and intuitive knowledge, it is ironic that in our western educational system these forms of knowing have been relegated to the back seat privileging rational and cognitive knowledge. Children enter school and are made to sit in seats and be still. By the time we reach higher education, thinking and reasoning become so prized as a way of learning that we often become uncomfortable in our own bodies. Educators who value holistic ways of teaching and learning can adopt an embodied pedagogy however they need to understand and be sensitive to the fact that some learners may be resistant to "being in their bodies" and find ways to gradually move learners out of their comfort zones. Some ways educators might make use of embodied knowledge include calling attention to student's nonverbal cues and facilitating embodied experiential learning activities.

Embodying Women's Stories for Community Awareness and Social Action

Yolanda Nieves, Wilbur Wright College

Embodied knowledge exists. We can verify its existence by engaging the intellect alongside the stirring of memories, the sharing of the resonance of the spoken word, and being consciously attuned to the subconscious language of the body: its aches, pains, and moments of sublime well-being. When we tap into embodied knowledge it transcends the present moment of reality. In *The Brown Girls' Chronicles*, I as researcher, director, and co-performer experienced a "sur-reality"; a reality that rose above and beyond the past, the present, and the future as time intertwined itself in an intersection with space. As a member of a marginalized community, the experience of writing and performing became a reclaiming of the self. For the performers/co-collaborators, it was a collective reclaiming not just of themselves, but of a community's history; the performance itself became a moment where subjugated truths, not defined by meta-narratives, but by the realities of a people whose history has been systematically erased from dominant culture took center stage.

When marginalized communities engage in a performance of embodied knowledge, whether as performers or as audience members, subjugated truths are revealed and rescued. The subtle linguistical differences or the sub-cultural nuances that colored the narratives of the women I interviewed didn't matter. Each woman interviewed and every woman who performed the stories spoke with the power of poets. The bodies carried and relayed information in a way that language could not. The language the body uses in a performance is that of the intuitive and of the spirit-of cellular molecular structures opening the doorway for the whirlwind of repressed truths. With over twenty-five performances of *The Brown Girls' Chronicles* no

performance was ever the same. The performativity of the narratives maintained a constant evocation of truths and the audiences' responses remained constant. Audiences were nudged and pushed to remember. In the act of remembering, audiences themselves embodied a call to action. Their call of action was to remember and tell their own stories to whoever would listen.

Narratives intrinsically contain embodied knowledge. During the time I conducted the interviews, so much of the embodied knowledge was not revealed in words. The verbal narrative almost became secondary. It was the unintentional pauses, the hiccups, the tears, the smiles, and all the other facial and bodily twitches and movements that carried a story of their own. Because of my insider-outsider status as researcher I knew that to overlook what the body was performing during the interview was to lose important data. If the keen eye of the interviewer is watchful, a researcher becomes the ultimate audience member. To hear the women's narratives firsthand demands a deconstruction of what we thought we knew to be true, and it demands a reconstruction of what we must do-to educate through performance. Performance may very well entail the radicalization of a community into action. So be it. However, even if that action is momentary-even if that action makes a temporary link to the subjugated truths and suppressed memory, it may incite an awareness that did not exist before. In that way the new knowledge revealed through performance can constitute praxis. That type of reconstruction of knowledge embodies the critical thinking we desire to elude from our students, many who may be constituents of marginalized communities.

As I constantly read and re-read the interviews, some of the moments caught on tape could be considered extemporaneous streams of consciousness narratives combined with well thought-out theoretical statements about gender, ethnicity, race, and class. My task was to reclaim the women's stories in a way that would honor their lived experiences and give those stories back to them. None of the women saw themselves as a storyteller or tribal griot. Yet, what their stories reflected was a profound remembrance of personal and accurate community history.

Dance as a Way of Knowing and Inquiry

Celeste Snowber, Simon Fraser University

Movement and dance cracks open embodied ways of learning, connecting human beings to their bodies, minds, hearts and imagination as they more deeply understand and question the world around them. The relationship between movement, dance, and the body becomes a place of inquiry and I explore its relationship to literacy, play, improvisation, and pedagogy, in order to expand the ways the expressive body can be practiced within adult learning. Central to my own teaching practice in working with pre-service teachers and graduate students within arts education and health education are integrating the physicality of movement with writing from the body. I open a way for theorizing through flesh and recovering a visceral language and draw on arts-based research methods and phenomenological understandings which support embodied ways of inquiry (Cancienne & Snowber, 2003). My passion over the years has been to find ways to let the body have a voice and place within educational contexts, where the words dance, and we can dance with our words. Connecting to bodily knowledge could be likened to having a free GPS system within us, always available to guide, and break open the capacity for listening with all our beings (Snowber, 2011). In other words, we need our full bodies for deeper understanding of what it means to be human in this world.

Dance invites us to think on our feet, and get our feet into our thinking. We teach with and through our bodies. I call it body pedagogy (Snowber, 2005) and integrate dance, creative movement, and improvisation as a way for students to access their bodies and make friends with their bodies. Movement and dance are not just to illustrate knowledge, but a way to grapple more deeply with the complexity of ways students and teachers can critically think; sift, perceive and eventually come to fresh understanding of

whatever subject they are studying and make sense of the world. The physicality of learning becomes the invitation to think with one's entire being and dance ushers in a way to connect biology and body, economics and intuitive thinking, human geography and physicality, or psychology and visceral awareness to name a few.

Why do we think that it is only the mind that can unravel, discover knowledge, when it is often our senses – the smell of lilacs, which remind us of childhood, or the feeling of swaying back and forth, which exudes comfort? We are an embodied people, designed as our birthright to dance and move. Dance, undoubtedly accesses many kind of knowledge beyond kinesthetic intelligence, including visual, tactile, mental, cognitive and emotional intelligence. How are questions changed when we ask them through our bodies? How does the body connect to what is happening in the ecological world? How can dance connect to grief situated within the belly, from the ache of our planet? The curriculum of our lives has the capacity to become the canvas from which is drawn upon as a place where theory and practice meet. Accessing this canvas becomes possible, when the language of dance can touch to the roots of experience and knowing. The body has constant data that speaks to us, whether that is the flurry in the stomach, the stretch of an elbow, or the abrupt contraction. By dancing our questions, we can uncover the questions underneath the questions, and open up a deep listening to the body's knowledge. The dancer follows the movement impulse, and is awakened to the nuances of the language of the heart, one that calls us back to an ancient way of knowing. Knowledge is therefore opened to the dancer in ways that are particular to the body's insight through the body's capacity to explore both balance and nonbalance, gravity and levity as places of perception and understanding. Dance is the invitation to reclaim an embodied inspiration – the entrance to our knowing which is filled with a lifetime of mystery and magic. More than ever, it is the questions, which we must pay attention to, dance from and live into a new way of being in the world.

Understand with the Body: Somatic Learning, Community Building and the Adult Learner

Luis Kong, Sacramento State University

The act of opening and liberating multiple ways of learning and engaging in the exploration of knowledge through body movement, ventures beyond our limits in the way we chose to learn and the way we chose to act as engaged citizens and adult learners. Somatic learning in adult education provides a cyclical framework for learning and reflection, and it serves as a deep well into learning and knowing in adult education. The transformative and creative learning process using body movement and vocalization are ways this embodied learning process is transferred into everyday experiences by adult practitioners in martial arts, in educational settings and in community building.

Community building efforts depend on resisting and changing established set of codes by expanding institutional capacity and developing leadership within a variety of locations, including neighborhoods and organizations. One of the key steps used in community building is the creation of a learning space where participants share their stories. Storytelling through role-playing is a way to contextualize somatic learning in community building. Alternative sources of expression and dialogue are also exposed through participation in folkloric dance, using Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed for community story development or by engaging in the practice of vocalization through chanting slogans to prepare for a community action.

These external expressions stimulate an internal interactive complexity within the body that is rooted in our history, experiences, challenges and education that frame our view of the world around us. By participating in activities within communities of practice such as a community organizing efforts or a dojo, a martial arts community of practice, personal stories can be transformed through embodied learning by building a community memory that supports a deeper understanding over time of who the participants are,

how they interact, and how together they are discovering new embodied languages through movement. The co-creation of lived-experience through dialogic interaction regenerates a community's voice. Storytelling enriches the imagination and serves as a vehicle for cultural survival. One such community is reflected in a Japanese martial arts practice called Shintaido, a new body way.

Shintaido is an expressive combination of martial arts and body movement that has been called "moving meditation." It provokes in the practitioners a sense of openness, enhanced perspective, as well as a challenge to go beyond imposed limits and conventional approaches to knowing and learning about the life energy in the body. By creating positive images practitioners construct an expanded sense of self and the world through a repertoire of body movement and posture. The community of practice formed by the interaction of Shintaido participants supports the enrichment of dialogue, the sharing of common experiences and the unifying call to use their practice for the improvement of a larger common good. The act of giving one-self and giving fully is a powerful theme in Shintaido, particularly when engaged in a dynamic dialogic exchange between practitioners or learners. Movement gives coherence to life.

The sense of *Kumite*, partner exchange, from the dojo to the street or work, was an image that many Shintaido participants used to refer to the building of relationships, and their ability to choose to receive or give by acting as a grounding force with conflicts and with every day life. In a research project I conducted on somatic learning, Mark, who is a hospice social worker, said, "there is a lot of partner exchange that goes on sitting with people, talking, listening, being in silence. The idea of leading and following and trying to be sensitive to where to go with the client." Mark related an experience with a 94-year-old patient who was terminally ill. They would sit together and hold hands. His hands were very grounding to her. He said, "sometimes we talk or I initiate a conversation. It flows like life, a wakame (seaweed) feeling where you don't care at certain point who is the wave and who is the fish. You are just in the moment." Mark finds his experience with Shintaido useful as an image that is applicable to his work and as a way to be in relationship with others.

Their ability to imagine and express the non-linear and non-Western concept of Ten-Chi-Jin through movement, allowed Shintaido practitioners to create an active body and an awareness of their inner energy that supported their giving and receiving in their daily life practice. The Shintaido practitioners benefited from learning experientially, engaging in reflective moments to discuss their practice, and being able to transfer their experiences to real life situations. By embedding a set of core movements in their practice, they facilitated an understanding of affirmative competencies resulting in positive attitude and an openness to listen to the body's ability to learn, give and receive. Alternative forms of expression, in addition to cognitive modes, provide opportunities to expand the learner's intellectual curiosity and focus by harvesting the metaphors and images that creative activity can inspire. Shintaido practitioners showed a keen ability to transfer their somatic awareness to daily life situations. They were able to use imagery and metaphor that integrated their personal values with the principles of their martial arts practice resulting in positive actions or choices in their communities and at their workplace.

The movement experience provides an organic and non-rational way to tap into the body and mind's wisdom to engage in investigation and to envision the inquiry process in a unique and expressive way.

The Collective Nature of Embodied Knowledge: Experiences from an African Game Drive

Peggy Gabo Ntseane, University of Botswana

Molomo fa o bina o roga o mongwe
(When your mouth dances it insults others)

The above proverb from the Tswana traditions stresses the importance of body language. Learning through the body of people and animals is no exception. As Lawrence (2012) rightly observed, valuing body knowledge involves deep listening. In the African context, 'deep listening' means reading between the lines of proverbs, actions and stories. Non-verbal body messages by the diverse community of 'knowers', namely, people and other earth inhabitants creates conducive environments for lifelong learning.

According to the literature (Chilisa, 2012; Ntseane, 2012) indigenous paradigms come from the fundamental believe that knowledge is relational because it is shared with all creation. Among the Africans of Southern Africa where the author comes from, the *Ubuntu* worldview expresses an ontology that addresses relations among people, relations with the living and the non-living, and a spiritual existence that promotes love and harmony among people and their communities. Recent literature on experiential learning especially adventure education (Lawrence, 2012; Howden, 2012;), recognizes that physical experience is fundamental to learning that is implementable and transferable. Informed by this scholarship, the experience of tourists at a Game Reserve in Botswana, Southern Africa is used to argue that in oral cultures like those in Africa, knowledge and wisdom stored in all bodies (i.e. both human and those of other animals) has not benefited by the development of adult education theory and practice.

Five tourists from Europe and two locals (the tour guide and the author) jumped onto a tourist vehicle to view the wildlife at a wild game reserve near the city of Gaborone in Botswana. The tour guide asked his passengers to introduce themselves including countries where they came from. The tour-guide thanked us for the introductions and then informed us, "If you see the inhabitants of this territory, I hope we will please note that in addition to seeing the wild life, I will also share knowledge and information about life in this community." We drove for some time without seeing anything, when we were halfway through the drive he said: "Don't worry good people, we will see them and very soon. Do you see that bird?", pointing at the bird sitting on the tallest branch of a tree. When the tourists started positioning their cameras, he said, "While taking pictures of the bird also listen carefully to the rhythm of the sound made by that bird. I will tell you what it is saying to other members of the community later." When his passengers were done with pictures of the beautiful bird, we drove off and hardly two minutes later he suddenly stopped the van and asked, "What do you see on the right?" We all shouted Giraffe!! But this time, while everybody was taking pictures, he again asked us to look very closely at what the Giraffe was doing with its body before it runs away. After the Giraffe ran away, all of a sudden many trees started shaking and a whole lot of wildlife appeared and everybody was happy to see and photograph them. After the game drive the guide asked if one of us could make the sound made by the bird that was sitting on the tallest tree. He then explained that when that bird makes that particular sound, it was communicating with the members of the territory to say we have an intruder. This alerted the tallest animal, namely, the Giraffe to stand still, stretch its long neck to survey on behalf of other animals. When it heard the sound of the car engine and physically saw the vehicle, it then ran away and tree branches also started shaking confirmed to the rest of the animals that it was time to stop what they were doing to see and be seen by the visitors before they gracefully moved away from the road. This kind gesture allowed the tourists to take nice pictures of the animals. Furthermore, it gave the tourists the opportunity to feel welcome in the wildlife community. According to the tour guide, this is what makes the

African game drive a memorable and joyful experience. Another piece of embodied data that the tour-guide identified was the ant-hill. He informed us that “it always tilts to the west. Related to this was the gum like fruit on a specific tree trunk/stem, is always on one side of this tree. So when lost in wilderness indigenous people from this geographic location always looks for the ant-hill for the west direction and this particular tree for the north direction.”

Left at the physical realm, this game drive experience was probably a time of fond memories for the tourists but not much more. Participants were less likely to have learnt anything about themselves and how they related with one another or with the animals. However, listening to the sounds and analyzing the physical body movements and experiences, is critical for the learning process in this African context. This game drive did demonstrate that indeed knowledge and wisdom are stored in all bodies of the living inhabitants (i.e. both people and animals). In fact, the literature on embodied experience (Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1985) observes that when the element of reflection is added to the embodied experience, an environment for learners which focuses on individual and group actions is created.

Informed by these experiences from an African game drive, it is argued that the embodied physical and emotions experiences of the bird, giraffe, trees and human beings collectively illustrate that all cultures rely on a much broader spectrum of epistemologies than the mainstream Western culture. Using the relational theoretical perspective to analyze data from this case, it is argued that the relational and interconnected nature of embodied knowledge demonstrated by bodies of the different species represented at this particular game park, the relationship between leisure, environment, physical messages (bird sound, Giraffe consciousness, tree movements), and the cultural-based wisdom of the tour guide are a source of knowledge that has been marginalized in preference for individually based rational thought processes.

It is concluded that embodied knowledge can be a collective social experience where repressed and subjugated truths can be transferred from people to people. Furthermore, due to the collective nature of embodied knowledge demonstrated in this African context, adult educators might consider talking to others about what they see, feel and know to find alternative ways to share their research, resources and knowledge. Finally, it is also argued that if the 21st Century is characterized by the need to validate and embrace other indigenous ways of learning, adult education can draw from embodied and interconnected experiences currently hidden in diverse contexts of the globe. There is need to construct and transfer knowledge in a manner that builds and sustains relationships with the environment and that is respectful of embodied inhabitants.

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