

Why writing my thoughts is too slow and embodying now is a preferred way of learning: Phenomenology from my conscious and unconscious experience

*“Once a physicist said to me, “The world exists so that I can do my math.”*

*I thought about that for a split second and then said, “You mean the world exists so that I can make my dances?”*

*He grinned and said, “Why not?”*

*Actually, I think the dances exist so that I can live in the world.*

*~L. Lerman, 2014.*

Harnessing the meanings of “embodiment” onto paper seems to make me clumsy. Words aren’t the problem. My difficulty with this particular paper topic is that writing is too slow to keep up with my thoughts, the grammar drags behind like a bad muffler. My mind created that thought innumerable impulses ago. Holding the concept long enough to write it clearly is metaphorically like capturing the high frequencies of a Doppler effect before it declines. The thought I embody during the first word of a sentence is already only a memory once it is written.

At some stages in my research I wondered how I ended up wanting to learn about embodiment, learning with movement, and dance in *this particular* degree program rather than at a performing arts university, or in an arts education program. The fact that I’m studying creative and critical *thinking* and am drawn to *embodiment* suggests that I’m to find language that’s agreeable to academic and embodied disciplines, such as dance, acting, sports, singing and playing. I intuit that the body thinks more than we allow ourselves to be aware of, and I want to find creative and critical ways to give somatic experience the credit it’s due. As I sought information and people with whom to forge intentionally embodied

connections, questions emerged from questions. I've included a few in this paper.

Before my research, I unconsciously assumed that dancers aren't mentally astute, that they are overly concerned about appearances and gaining attention. Perhaps I'm not alone in that assumption, or something akin to the belief that embodied people don't think critically, they merely wisp around is if nothing is of much consequence, like monks or hippies (or people that truly believe that nothing is of much consequence!) My assumption made a barrier for my self awareness, growth and realization, I ignorantly divided dance and thinking disciplines that actually do coincide in the world. Catching that bias, another tendency became clear. I consider dancers less astute than anyone with a college degree, and yet wish to dance with confidence that I can move with emotional and physical inhibition. The reverse ludicrous mis-logic is that I consider myself much more of an artist and empath than any thinking disposition. That attitude came from my public school education and my personal influencers, of which we all have in our lives. Perhaps as creative and critical thinkers, it's time to consider the use of the body beyond transportation for the brain, especially in light of growing knowledge of the brain as part of the body, due to recovery from PTSD, gut health, stress management, and the gains of the Millennial generation who spends more and more time outdoors in embodied recreation.

#### *SOLICITING MY AUDIENCE*

*How does moving help us learn? And how does it help us learn together? Those questions created new ones, such as, *Why are so many people disgusted by the body when we all have bodies? Who gets to dance? And what about?**

(Lerman,2014) Whenever I happen upon a meaningful passage that zeros-in on a concept my inner voice says, "Ah-ha! I told you so! This is more proof that our thinking is far more embodied than we let ourselves experience!" I'm addressing a chorus of distant, anonymous faces often called "they" - people who reinforce the social status quo of body and brain disconnect, or body denial. "They" includes anyone who wants to break from status quo but doesn't know that fissures are already happening in body politics, and those who stand to benefit from breaking status quo, but are afraid to inhabit their bodies due to archaic cultural messages of shame. I've been in all three categories. It's my belief that we all are at some point, as products of each era's exemplars unfold and we challenge that system to fade. My audience for this composition is necessarily, "Us", anyone who has a body.

We are prone to not notice our experience of embodiment, what goes in an experience, and the value of experiences. My research findings made around me a bubble of heterogeneous beliefs about the relevance of moving and dancing,

no counter-arguments except for the late adopters who are more inclined to sit than move. I find it hard not to assume that they make counter-arguments that embodied learning through movement isn't real because they have yet to experience the difference.

This work originated from an inkling of something being true from the perspective of a sitting, bashful would-be-dancer. If the academic standard of demonstrating learning was in movement I would have had a much easier time of making this pre-manifesto or demi-magnum opus. I'd perform a choreography, a *story-form* based on my current understanding. Words, stillness, breathing, walking and other intentional movements would be useful tools for sorting what I know about embodiment, highlighting discoveries by repeating the movement until its details could be analyzed one by one and selected for their contribution to the whole, or edited for a different movement. Thinking in four dimensions allows for learning practices, such as jotting notes, making models, conjuring lists of possibilities, similar to two and three-dimensional learning practices. Thinking in four dimensions with one's own body requires very few supplies, is easy to clean up, can be edited without much loss, and once you have moved through your thought you're more likely to remember the entire experience. This way would be so much more efficient to find and show everyone present *just* how a body of knowledge with parts and functions, takes place as an event. The fun of its own metaphor would remain effervescent with active verbs and rests, and passages to expand. This performance may be forthcoming!

### NOTICE THE SNOW

My research illuminated a growing awareness across unrelated fields, like education, neuro kinesiology, neurolinguistics, therapies, the study of PTSD, gender identity, and other current body politics. Experience as Art, by John Dewey, 1934, describes experience as if it were a work of art, serving as a lens for the other disciplines. . He uses 24 pages to illustrate the concept "experience" in contexts that we take for granted daily. His densely descriptive writing honors and illuminates the complexity of the metaphysical. His writing is boggling to comprehend at first and requires immersive concentration to glean any of his poetry, even though this chapter *is* poetry at its core!

The word *experience* is a placeholder for things that require many written paragraphs to convey, while the body already knows it and waits for the words to fall into order. There could be words made for each application of *experience*, the way that the cliched and mythologized example of "300 Inuit words for snow" in the Inuit and Yupik languages has been credited (Boas). He begins chapter three, "Having an Experience." The title reminds me of "What to Expect When You're Expecting", since *having*, is *experiencing*. "Experience occurs continuously..." There are no boundaries of experiences yet.

Maybe many of us take this fundamental truth for granted and need for it to be pointed out, right *-there!* My observation brings me to an opinion that we take our bodies for granted the same way, which is related to “colonization of the body.” This is a new term for me. It was used by the dancers I interviewed and it refers to the original dominance of Christian European influence over primitive cultures they invaded. The correlation is that we have come to worship the power and willfulness of the brain to the extent of abuse over the quiet and non-linear wisdom of the body. Dewey creates the foundation of this chapter acknowledging that experience is something we often don’t notice. Colonization of the body must mean that we don’t know that someone or something else may be suffering from our actions. We have an opportunity to ask ourselves if we want to continue the small civil war going on around us and within us daily, as we push our brains to do more and more while ignoring our physiology more and more. This is not a generalization- it really is happening here at home in our bodies because we haven’t created a culture that is safe and welcoming for the body and all its functions- let alone, be a partner to the brain. Critically thinking- isn’t it bizarre that our contemporary culture chastises our corporeal form and favors thinking and logic, which can’t be seen, while simultaneously preferring empirical proof?

#### *FROM MY EXPERIENCE*

In lieu of mutually sharing experiences and gleaning what is of most relevance to each of us, and gathering fresh conclusions, I’ll share an experience of my own. At the time it was still an inchoate experience. Just as if this writing were a staged performance, I invite you to look through my experience and become one with it so that we can share and learn together. This experience memory is titled, “My World,” because at the time it had no distinct beginning and end- it was just *life*.

*I can read some words. Mommy asks me to read signs when we’re riding in the car and I know them, but I don’t remember when I found out how to read. I can play violin, too- I have one and a baby guitar.*

“Learning” doesn’t seem to be a focus yet at this stage of life, even though that’s actually the entire preoccupation at this age. Finding out, being exposed to things and imagining “what if?” are more important than anything else. This child plays in the world with freedom, moving from one thing to the next, absorbed. Like most little ones, she believes that unlikely things are easily managed, such as playing the violin while also learning words. Later this little one will know that she actually can read the street signs, but playing the violin or baby guitar is about producing peasant sounds produced with practiced skills, not just scratching the stick over the violin strings. For now, she is completely innocent and primitive.

Dewey's second definition is of having *an* experience, "when the material runs its course to fulfillment." The previous experience is disqualified from being *an* experience because my recollection of it has no definitive beginning or end. My childhood did end, but not in one final flash. I'll offer another example from my life that has a bit more definition.

*"I don't really like school anymore. Some parts I like, but I feel it's a long day and my head gets tired. Sometimes my tummy hurts like something is punchy inside and I feel like crying. All the things I like to do are at home, so today I walked to school very slow because I didn't want to go. I got in trouble from my teacher for being late. "*

That was my first tardy of many, and it contributed to an actual physically embodied chain reaction that gave rise to more dread of school and more tardiness.

So far I've described "experience", "*an* experience", and now what we'd refer to as "*a real* experience", or an enduring memorial of that type of experience. These layers are very much like matryoshka dolls, and the layers will continue beyond the word "experience." Dewey wrote, "In such experiences, every successive part flows freely, without seam and without unfilled blanks, into what ensues. At the same time, there is no sacrifice of the self-identity of the parts." Some of his prose to focus on a quick definition, "An experience has a unity that gives it its name, *that* meal, *that* storm, *that* rupture of friendship. The existence of this unity is constituted by a single quality that pervades the entire experience in spite of the variation of its constituent parts." In the next sentence, he says, "This unity is neither emotional, practical, nor intellectual, for these terms name distinctions that reflection can make within it."

If I understand correctly that he means making distinctions of an experience only happens in reflecting after the fact, then I disagree with Dewey here. Based on what I've learned about the event called, *myelination*, that takes place in the brain. I use "event" to describe the learning and myelination processes because at the microscopic scale these certainly are like a skyscraper being erected in a city. In the timeline of a person's life, they are markers of experiences and events. Myelin was discovered in 1854 by Rudolf Virchow, but I don't know when the myelination event was connected to learning, or when the role of emotion in learning was established. Pioneer psychologist of the mind-body connection, Bessel van der Kerk, published his first book in light of healing PTSD in 1984 and continued to teach about where learning is physically embedded in the brain. I have a strong hunch that Dewey didn't have the latest research available to revise this thought on making distinctions of an experience only in reflecting after the fact. Van Der Kerk (2014) and Jensen point out that learning is always connected to an emotional value. In the case of trauma, "learning" is

generally sensory input from the periphery of threat, and neurons are physically attached in the Limbic region of the brain as implicit memory. The Limbic brain is wired for survival and is highly emotional but can't tell time. PTSD therapies help to move a neural attachment from where experiences are still so raw in recollection, to areas of the brain that remember, but without anguish. So, not only is learning and experience emotional once they have the qualities of Dewey's third layer of experience as "an enduring memorial," but also the brain and its various tissues are able to organize according to emotion and level of personal safety.

Continuing back to the third layer of experience Dewey introduced as, "a *real* experience." Here are four examples that fit into the narrative of myself as a schoolgirl from second grade to high school. These are cherished moments that inform my sense of aliveness through one's talent. It feels important to word these examples as if I was at the age when these things happened so that these words are less of a report and more of an embodiment of the person who has experienced these narratives.

*"There were three times when I really liked school because it was fun and I could pretend—I didn't even know I was learning because it looked like we were playing! One day in the second grade a visitor teacher came and we moved around on the floor together and then we talked about what we did. I don't remember what we learned about, but I remember it felt like recess, and then at the end we felt so smart because what we did! After that day I wanted to be that kind of teacher and always have fun days in school."*

*"At the end of sixth-grade drama club, our coach asked us questions to know what we learned. We were remembering our skits and pantomimes and new skills together. Then the coach interrupted us to get paper and a pen so she could write down what we were saying. She said we had pearls of wisdom, and I never heard that before. I knew it was something like being wise, and I liked to feel wise."*

*"This year I got to do a monologue for the Martin Luther King Assembly at school. I practiced it with Miss Cooke for like, forever, until I thought I couldn't get it any better but it did. When I performed that I wasn't scared because I felt like the girl in the monologue, and she was so angry. I kinda knew I could do that but my friends didn't know, and I liked being a different way in front of them. For the rest of the day, I felt like I had a special power. I never want that to go away."*

In each of these sample experiences, the event is encapsulated with reflective discussion afterward, as if the embodied learning hadn't *quite* finished until final words were put to it. Similar to a dance workshop that aims to create and present a dance "show." That end cap and the anticipation of it focus the energies of

participants on the activity to make it significantly worth doing, making it a performance of key significance.

Moving past the experience as a signifying act and onto the qualitative experience in the raw form. Dewey's fourth example, "The experience itself has a satisfying emotional quality because it possesses internal integration and fulfillment reached through ordered and organized movement." It's been hard for me to find the words to gather all that I experience in workshops and in some of my own works of art, where the realization itself is more precious than the result. So, challenging as that is, as I read Dewey's words, I wonder if he is spontaneously musing or if he has rehearsed that specific phrase on page 38. He should be musing because then he'd be a better example of his own idea. For me this sentence is poetry, and I have an envy for not having written it. In the three examples recounted above, seeing the activity take place and unfold is actually the only way to truly observe this qualitative experience. However, some clues in the wording can be found in the age, tone and word choice of the speaker that hint at evolution, a glimmer of something genuine just now emerging. Here is an example from the same narrative later in life: (Not to worry, the story has a triumphant conclusion.)

*"When I graduated art school I joined a cult, and after I left the cult there was so much going on inside me that I couldn't understand. It was actually impossible to talk about it. My therapist did dance therapy with me instead of talking. One day I remember clearly was when I laid on my back with my eyes closed and rolled so slowly to my side -so slowly that my movement seemed unnoticeable and that time moved slower. I don't know if that movement meant anything I just know that it seemed like what I needed to do."*

This passage has three layers. The information about a cult, which has been addressed as an experience of enduring threat to the self, and insight about mind-body through recovery. Turning our attention to the described action of rolling over imperceptibly slowly for no other reason than its satisfaction for the soma to communicate with itself, we sense the body guiding the thinking mind. This time, the body has the complete care of what is happening and so the brain and thoughts can quietly restore. It's as if the body asks if it feels good to roll over this way, and the brain responds positively. We're accustomed to hearing our thoughts tell our bodies what to do.

Completing the constellation of experiencing are automatic "doings" that are impossible to learn from in the present, experiences that add to what we already know, experiences that evoke emotions and cause a response, and finally, experiences that are meaningful because subtle emotions alert our minds to perceive aesthetically, we need to discern learning with the soma from kinesthetic learning, the model for learning modalities.

## PREFERRED MODALITY

Since hearing of kinesthetic learning, I identified myself as a student who mostly learned by doing, and therefore, a kinesthetic learner. I enjoy being immersed in a subject with my entirety which isn't as literal as it sounds. Kinesthetic learning is much more basic. The VAK model (visual, audio, kinesthetic) of learning modalities is to categorize learning through each primary sense gate where information enters the body and travels through the spinal nerves to the brain. Tesia Marshik, an assistant professor of psychology at University of Wisconsin, LaCross, declares in her TEDx talk that the VAK model is incorrect even though the practice of finding our learning style is pervasive. She goes on to say that our sensory preferences are legitimate, in tests the preferred sensory modality makes no difference at all. The difference is relevant to what is being learned, so if we were experiencing the learning of colors and their names we really need to see the color. If I'm writing about the experience it's optimal if we actually experience the topic of my writing, by practicing the sensation of embodiment, movement or dance and assigning the experience meaning. All ages learn by emotion-meaning making, or, as Dewey says, its aesthetic, which is perceptual and separate from artistic talent, though hopefully, artists can perceive beauty. I'm not necessarily a kinesthetic learner. After all, In the memory of the guest teacher coming to my class, I remember the dingy green carpet, its low nap texture, and its smell very clearly. On that day we moved all of our desks aside to move on the floor, which was really an *exceptional* experience, and a memorial above all other floor experiences. My response of delight and absorption of the floor were evidence of microscopic events happening in my brain. Maybe instead of limiting my learning modality to one of V, A or K, I could be a combination thereof, with some manual, and olfactory, too.

## I HAVE MYELIN, THEREFORE I AM

Let's begin with the two brain cells, neurons, and glia. Of the two, we know more about the neurons. They are the spark plug of the organ because they process information by converting chemical and electrical signals back and forth, and they grow new neurons. It's astonishing that the early Greeks knew about the neuron without brain imaging technology or microscopes, but knew enough about its behavior to aptly name it "neuron", meaning *bowstring*. The anatomy of the neuron includes the axon and dendrite, fibrous appendages that link neuron cell bodies. Information flows out of the axon to the synapse, to the linking dendrite. Learning requires this marvelous chain reaction, which occurs at a speed that is instantaneous as far as non-neurologists are probably concerned. The interneurons outnumber the neurons and are most commonly referred to as "glial" cells - or *glue*, in early Greek anatomy. Glial cells are essentially the nurse-maid of the brain, maintain its health by composing blood-brain barriers,



delivering nutrients, regulating the immune system and removing dead cells. This anatomy is the supreme evidence of embodied learning because that's the sole occupation the neuron.

We can observe the causal chain, or event, of learning- at least, the theory of it at this time, to find out *what* happens, even if we don't yet know *how* it happens. First, there is a stimulating circumstance outside the person's brain, such as the sound of a cat's meow, the smell of smoke, or the texture of gravel underfoot. Internal events, such as spontaneous ideas or brainstorming are also a stimulus for the beginning of the brain process. Maybe the event is completely novel or maybe we have already done this a hundred times. Repeated events, 'exercises', make the neural path from axon to dendrite more and more efficient. The more efficient, the *less* that area of the brain lights up in PET scans. The first time the 'stimulus' happened more of our brain was involved and it was less efficient at the task.

When a new circumstance is still a *stimulus* and not yet an *exercise*, it produces more beneficial energy. The energy is converted to nerve impulses and is sorted in the thalamus, in the middle of the brain. Once the event has been done and becomes an *exercise*, multi-sensory inputs commingle in the hippocampus and make a "*map*." Building onto the *exercise event* makes new neurons that connect and can potentially grow to form "neuron forests." This is neurogenesis, incorporated experiences that propagates new neurons. With exposure to the event and subsequent additions to it, we use the neuron connections nearly effortlessly, creating patterns of neuron chains.

The very beginning of the neuron chain building begins in utero at eighteen weeks, way before we are aware of being. We are simultaneously an extension of our mothers and unto ourselves. For now, our complete world is provided by the uterus -our nourishment, safety, and our physical wellness. This is the beginning of Maslow's Hierarchy of Need, the first inklings of information prior to reaching beyond our bodies for resources. Learning is inextricably connected to the emotional response by way of proximity to nurturing elements, even though the fetus has no concept of emotions or nurturing. Within the first year, a baby experiences basic emotions with feedback from care providers and object interaction. Cold, hard and exposed means separation and is emotionally disturbing. Warmth and softness mean safety, belonging and intimacy. As the child grows up, the unspoken curiosities, "what is this?" and later, "why?" make more complex meanings with the emotional tone the child feels while exposed to the new experience.

*METAPHORS IN THE BRAIN*

The puzzle of experiences and feelings assemble into “clouds” of neurons and are thus memories. Some research says this disposition is innate, others say it is developed with visual perception. I find George Lakoff’s (2015) detailed narrative of words used for space, distance, and proximity immensely fascinating and useful for thinking of the origins of our language cognition, figures of speech and puns. He also shows us that we think in embodied metaphor, that everything we know begins with the need for attachment to thrive, and each myelin connection after attachment is made of spacial relationships that are felt, not measured. The clearest example he offers is the use of the word, “over.” In one sense, “over” describes an event that has passed in a duration of time, as in, “I’ve gotten over the flu.” We understand with teaching and practice that I’m not walking on a path with the flu virus lying in the way. We also say, “go over the bridge,” “take this over to the table,” “over the rainbow,” and “read over this.” Words around “over” give contextual clues about which type of motion through or within space we will travel. Different areas of the brain light up in MRI tests when the context is spacial than in figurative uses. We embody an assembly of meanings in a word and understand that the word isn’t the object itself. Further, Lakoff gives a physical demonstration in small steps. We are thirsty, an experience of need we know from infancy. We see water contained in a cup top on of a table, over there. Before getting water into our mouths we know from physical experience and neural metaphor building that the substance we see is water, the remedy for our thirst. It is in a solid, rigid, transparent vessel which we will wrap our hands around, grasp just so, bend our elbows to that the edge of the cup goes to our lips, and so on until we have quenched our thirst. The whole while our neurons fire like crazy to offer implicit information, which we no longer need to be conscious of to perform drinking. Meanwhile, our conscious thinking, “Ah! Much better now” or, “Blech! I thought this was water!!” when we accidentally drink vodka. “Ah!” And “Ew!” Are obviously emotionally based learning experiences, and holding the cup with all of its sensory messages also registers emotion, particularly on the first encounter when the cup is novel. The connection of the neural synapse and axons are essentially fused together by novelty and emotion.

The fourth layer, experience in perception, “The experience itself has a satisfying emotional quality because it possesses internal integration and fulfillment reached through ordered and organized movement” organizes all we do by its aesthetic quality. We recall the clarity and wetness of water, and that the glass around the water is also clear, but brittle and breakable. We remember how it feels in the hand, the fingertips on a glass, the proprioception to hold it upright and steadily pour it into our mouths. All of this is based on qualitative perception and the aesthetic we suffuse in every minute aspect of a given task. Somehow, miraculously, even drinking water from a glass has meaning- it means survival

and replenishment. I feel awe that the stringy neurons and fatty myelin sheath contain the potentiality to orchestrate experience, learning, meaning making and survival.

Our entire bodies interpret the world and communicate in non-cognitive, non-linear metaphors. We use these subconscious ideas in phrases all the time without much thought about where the words are coming from. Perhaps some of us think we're clever by illustrating our busy day with, "I'm spinning plates," feeling overwhelmed, "I have a lot on my plate." The person we're talking to knows better than to look for plates. Take a moment to consider figurative puns you might occasionally use so the written concepts "sink in" (to what?) and you might become cognitively aware your own feelings associated with the words. Perhaps after taking consideration of the prevalence of puns, you won't be made to feel that your humor is hackneyed the next time you intend or don't intend a pun because it's a sign of mind-body integration and intelligence.

All of this must mean that emotions and thoughts are not figments of our mind, they are physically present in our corporeal brain. In Lakoff's demonstration we analyzed how minute the non-cognitive thinking is, and as far as two dancers whom I've interviewed are concerned, he also demonstrates why each and every person is a dancer, know it or not, and like it or not.

Before looking into the myelination event in the brain, and how the learned data is based on sensory metaphor, I was referring to Tesia Marshik's (2015) findings that the VAK model is outmoded. If I could ask John Dewey what he thought of the VAK model, He'd probably say that it's synonymous with automatic "doing" because the student isn't learning how to see, hear or use the body. In other words, knowledge of the skills required for these tasks is already implicit. They aren't even skills that are being added to by new experiences.

Now I think of my sense of learning as emotionally based and aesthetic, which allows me to be a visual artist, to learn my multiplication table with mnemonics, and still feel fidgety when I've sat too long. The latter is a symptom of loving movement more than buckling down to a chair and lack of blood flow to the brain. Micheal Kuczala (2015), TEDxAshburn presenter and co-author of, "The Kinesthetic Classroom: Teaching and Learning Through Movement," supports that moving the body and blood flow, meaning making and inspired teaching overlap in neurogenesis. Kuczala's point could be restated, *get up from your bum and be active learners, and also teach with activity.*

Pretending, playing, creativity in the arts, and meaning-making directly relate to embodiment, which supports cognitive learning and empathic community building. By shining light on many ways that embodied learning is present in all life stages, I hope to enliven your awareness of your own embodied learning.

Perhaps you'll sort your own experiences with the framework provided by Dewey, especially the ones you've dismissed as insignificant or embarrassing to feel through the spectrum in a way that is meaningful to you. If you challenge yourself to find the aesthetic quality of these recalled experiences, maybe you'll become more aware of your perception that savors details. Keep in mind that aesthetic perception and artistic skill are separate propensities. For example, I write miserably soggy poetry but feel as elated by reading a poem as if I'd penned it myself. I sense that writing and appreciating are similar in the brain. At least for myself, writing a bad poem feels as ecstatic as writing a good one, or reading a poem by one of my favorites, e.e. cummings. Conversely, maybe not knowing the difference is precisely why my poems make me cringe once the creative trance has passed and my aesthetic perception is nonplussed about the disappearance of the beautiful free verse.

#### WHO GETS TO SEE AESTHETICALLY?

Both Barrett and Schön (2016) stress the importance of acknowledging the *experience of having the experience*. (Dewey, 1934) Clumsy that phrase may be, but I take it to eloquently say, 'be curious, pay attention, investigate what is happening in all the angles you can find.' From my study of Buddhism, any chance to savor a moment actually sounds decadent, lovely and fun. Slade (EKSIG 2015) reflects, "As I navigate my way through the interconnecting folds of experiential knowledge through materials, I am aware of underpinning concerns that steer my journey." I take this to mean that her artistic interaction with materials is aided by when she wakefully appreciates what draws her interest, and then goes toward her interests. Slade is able to work with her aesthetic perception of the wood she is carving, she nearly hears it speaking to her about where to carve.

I bring in the example of working with material as an artist to highlight that being an artist isn't the prerequisite to making meaningful and aesthetic things. First of all, consent needn't be sought because it's our birthright to make meaning and beauty, our bodies are equipped to do so without our conscious authorization. Aesthetic perception is natural and improves with engagement. An arguably successful artist must have an aesthetic appreciation or they wouldn't know why they'd gathered bits and bobs to glue together. However, one needn't be an artist to enjoy meaning making and creative play. That ideation has a deathly effect on fun, and snobbery of virtuosity over creative exploration is yet another facet of colonization of the body. We are made to believe our natural joys are wastes of time, children's games, or dessert after work is done. So many of my new adult drawing students verge on anxiety attacks during class because they are nearer to the forbidden realm of creative fun than they "should" be -according to whom? The choir of distant faces known as "They", constantly frowning on us.

Childhood pedagogy, contemporary cultural anthropology, and the arts show the degree to which lifelong creativity is embodied in Western society. Outside of school, society at large either reflects or fails to showcase the potential of maturing imaginations. In the best circumstances, one never out-grows active exploration of our surroundings. Immersive learning activities are frequently relegated to children, for adults who can afford leisure or adults who own up to their curiosities.

Furthermore, even students utilizing VAK modalities may not succeed in art or non-art classes because what they are exposed to has yet to feel relevant in that phase of their lives and touch on the natural joy of a metaphysical realization. Since the master-apprentice model, and the current teacher as authority model, agency to make choices for ones' self has been switched with banking on ones' future. Some students never unlearn the wait for their time to come. Paulo Freire, Brazilian and author of, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, believed that authority class retains the lower classes from acting as prime movers in their own destinies. His wake up call is to take the agency, rather than wait for it to be granted. What better way is there for everyone to encounter their development and environment than by acknowledging the capacity to chose agency within our embodiment, getting off our bums *and* participating right away?

The best part of externalizing subjects and sharing the process with others is that the content shifts into a less personal context where aspects can be seen objectively and therefore, rather clearly. Physically active concept learning develops a student's disposition and translates into a love for learning, rather than absorbing the entire curriculum like data processor robots.

#### *A BREIF HISTORY OF CREATIVE PEDAGOGY IN THE U.S.*

Just after the turn of the century, unprecedented policy renewed values of public school and art education. An upswell of artists who resonated with the child art movement of Dewey and Piaget came to serve as teaching-artists and artist-healers, a new employment niche at that time. In 1886, the newly established settlement houses received education and social services. Teaching artists responded by easing the immigrant transition by providing art history, playing the role of today's ESL, and cultural training. Women primarily lead the teaching artist movement and facilitated social, economic and racial equality to arts access. With the WPA of 1933, came a series of programs called Federal One, employed artists in public works such as Federal Theater Project, the Negro

Theater project, the Federal Arts Project, and The Federal Music Project. The swell of creative capital challenged the age-old prejudice that the elite class makes Fine Art and everyone else makes primitive art or nothing that the self-elected elite judges considered artful. The snobbery certainly didn't pass away, but this era made a very significant marking contemporary art history. The next surge of teaching artists came with the repression of McCarthyism and the early years of the Civil Rights Movement with the desire to include anyone. The 70s brought CETA (Comprehensive Employment Act), which funded community arts projects that employed thousands of artists.

By and by, art education declined and a majority of that percentage was the lack of art education or exposure to art by Black and Latino children. White children held onto nearly the entire percentage of those who had art education. In the Nineties, the National Endowment for Arts was nearly shut down by political conservatives.

It stands to reason that the influence of political conservatives and general frustration around artist-teachers in schools made art, aesthetic history and appreciation pushed the arts underground. The arts that were "safe," meaning void of shock value and not fringe probably reinforced a standard of virtuosity acquired by a percentage of those who could pay for training and had obvious talent. The progress of equal access to creative outlets from only two decades prior shrank back to one of privilege. Those two factors combined with the increase of industry demands to put creative processes and individual development second in priority to manufacturing quantities of goods. Schools trained students for work demands and stunted individuality with "conveyor belt education."

Moving into the Information Age and accelerated learning, or "super learning," we have brain imaging devices to study living people that points out gaps in our understanding of the brain. The radically shifting job economy shows that educators need to devise new ways to prepare youth for a future that may look nothing like what we imagine. Only since approximately the late Nineties has teacher training included neurology to understand healthy brain learning versus a brain that isn't having all of its needs met. (Jensen, 1998)

#### *A GLIMPSE OF MOTIVATION*

Factors that support individuality and self-realization reflect Maslow's Hierarchy of Need. Obviously, the body must be well enough to continue essential life processes. We must have physical safety, and secure resources to tend to one's own needs and have stability. We require a community and belonging, to be seen and loved. We are entitled to self-love, to feeling respected and reciprocating that respect. We are entitled to feeling our capacities fulfilled, and

to self-confidence. These layers of need aren't guaranteed in the chaos of living. However, we can deliberately seek and share these precursors to the final layer of the hierarchy, Self Realization. Reaching this state is available in small portions at any moment of flowing creativity when we are actively appreciating the aesthetic of our embodied experience.

Ultimately, realizing our deepest, most embodied calling is what we most desire, but there are intersecting reasons that creativity isn't consciously carried into adult life. Nearly all of the parents of my young art students were too busy or "outgrew" their artistic days. They'd file in to pick up their kids, look at the day's art project and then tell me that they couldn't draw a stick figure or even a straight line "to save their lives." Their pitiful and annoying excuses gave me concern for their children who lacked models of confidence in cultivating beauty, even if only for pleasure and restoration, or that responsible grown-ups can draw or sculpt if it pleases them to do so. If there weren't rules about who gets to make beauty and adults felt welcome to dabble with their natural rights to draw a little image or dance a little step, they may experience the way that these skills can be absorptive, slow down time, refine their awareness and be as useful as meditation. The commonality between meditation and any aesthetic activity is the Observer, or Self, watching the observed self or object. Just as the mental activities writing poetry and appreciating the aesthetic of poetry are essentially one and the same, slowing down the brain to watch one's self is quite similar whether caught up in the ecstatic beauty of nature, making music or meditating.

Attitudes toward creativity need to be examined to adjust to our unfolding, unknown future. Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi is author and faculty in three universities, teaches about the positive psychology aspects, happiness, and creativity. His seminal work, Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience, changed my life. Before the time of this book's release, I'd never known of anyone taking creativity so seriously that they'd research it as an experience separate from any creative discipline. As an artist with a BFA, the experience of *flow* was familiar to me already. He described different scenarios when flow states of mind occurred to people in locations besides art. He thoroughly researched and described how to promote a flow state, though it can never be anticipated. One salient idea is the balance of an activity's difficulty level and one's motivation to complete the activity. If a person is motivated to complete a task but the difficulty level is too high, the person will feel discouraged and will likely quit before completing. If the person is motivated to complete the task but the difficulty is so low that has no challenge, the person may quit before completing because they're bored. In the middle range of these two axes is the place where flow states will most likely occur. After reading this piece information I knew I could respond to my students' parents with encouragement that they absolutely can be creative, and even find flow. In Csikszentmihalyi's examples,

creativity even included mountain hiking, so it's not a necessary to paint a masterpiece to be creative. It's about doing something that fascinates you and having the right conditions. These books turned me into an advocate for creativity for all- especially where it was least likely to be found in the non-artistic." If any of my students, adults or children alike, can find the balance of challenge and motivation and slip into a state of Flow, they have had a real experience with emotion and aesthetic- even if they are just washing dinner dishes.

### *PHENOMENOLOGY KEEPS HAPPENING*

Phenomenology is lived more than talked about. It's hard to put that subjective thing into words, especially when people tend to feel isolated existentially and don't like to draw attention to something about themselves that might cause embarrassment. There are different kinds of Phenomenology -and phenomena, all left to theory due to their extreme subjective range of aesthetic within any experience.

Merleau-Ponty, Husserl, and Heidegger have different ways of saying the same thing. It happens that dancers and actors frequently study Merleau-Ponty in college. Heidegger's definition seems to come from action, and Merleau-Ponty's voice seemed like the perspective of sitting to pontificate. Heidegger believes in something called, "Die Lichtung", German for, "the Lighting" (and some proximal translations). He believes in an authentic experience of being that you actually ARE for a passing moment from time to time. It could be that you already are this "lighting" - or that for various reasons, the pure form of you is sparked and shines out. Maybe Die Lichtung is the same thing as Chickszentmihalyi's "Flow," or the athlete's "zone." Caitlyn McAfee, one of the dancers I interviewed said, "Think about how thought occurs and the value of thought in an event... The point of phenomenology is to say there is a training process to becoming lucid in every event."

To isolate the meaning of lucid in the phenomenological sense, or in the sense of thought as movement, try this simple experiment: 1. Assuming you're sitting at a table, or have a lap, place your hand palm down on the table or lap. Now, move your hand and onto another area of the table or the other leg. 2. Once more from the starting position, and now think about going *from* the area of the table or leg that you're on. 3. And now once again, think about going *to* another area or the other leg. In those experiences, you moved your hand without many directions. Perhaps you did it wondering if something would happen and surprise you because it was such a mundane action. The next two times you did the same movement, thinking of going *from*, and then going *to*. That's connected to your lucidity during that event. A person who identifies themselves as "dancer" might relate to their movements this way, but the subjective measure is yours alone.



Another simple experiment is to place one hand on top of your head and pat your head, while I do the same movement. Tricky, we think we're doing the identical action, but we are not. You are the only one in the world with your hand, moving it the way you are at this time. And you are the only one in the world with your head, being patted by your hand. It's impossible for me to have your hand and make it pat your head just the way you do, as you.

Barbara Snook suggests, "Everybody has embodied knowledge." In the yoga class that I teach, I request that my students record an observation of their practice each session. With so much to transmit to them within an hour's time, it's a challenge to cue movements and to guide their attention to their own sensations -sensations that may actually be quite loud, but are hard to detect because they're always there and have never been considered before. My hope is that by asking them to jot down one single observation about their practice, they will become more attuned to their own inner signals and their body language. Yoga tends to be a solitary practice even if others are in the room with you. Engaging in and body practice with others is unexpectedly rich. "The interactive process of ideation, involved the participants not only in thinking but also in doing, is especially valuable for interaction design: "interaction, is ungraspable in more than one way. It only 'exists' when it happens." (Overbeeke, 2007).

The stated intention of a workshop may be to experience different types of movement or postures or body shapes, crouching low walking on toes curling up in a ball, then in reflection to realize that we've just described scientific phenomenon with their bodies. Perhaps we never fully understood that phenomena before, or were never able to articulate it. Sometimes in workshop, these things emerge from the holistic participation. Or a workshop may be structured to find out how molecules behave in different scenarios. The objective may be completely open-ended, or with the implied intention of solving a problem we're figuring something out. Even for people who are not trained dancers, improvised movements improve problem-solving abilities, increase divergent thinking. In contrast, participants engaged in memorizing specific dance steps improve debt convergent thinking. Patterns like these suggest that creative movement and embodied ideas can open our "possibility thinking" (Craft, 2002)

Claiming myself as a dancer and attending dance classes and workshops have been a radical development in my recent life. Finally, I see that the other participants came with a purpose to learn and had no desire to watch me and judge me. Then I stepped into the dance. I dropped my self-consciousness like a heavy cloak and started to remember the delicate sensation of experiencing learning while moving, the learning that I most loved as a child. The opportunity

to move, think through a sort of eye-hand coordination that expands over all of me, mind and body, is so much more than child's play.

I've been able to observe in real time what criteria is present when embodied learning takes place, whether in groups or alone. With consistent predictability, these are the things I see and reg a generous willingness on the part o the participant to be vulnerable, equally met with absolute regard for the emotional safety of the participants. A willingness to pursue any prompt with utmost curiosity to take everything seriously, though playfully. Artful facilitation and guidance of the dynamic flow from spontaneously arising events to the workshop's conclusion. A physical and heartfelt sense of revitalization, and such rich experience that sharing in words cannot be done. To look back and appreciate that the learning is both of the physical world and transpersonal, therefore, relevant to who I am becoming and everything I bring to the next conversation.

### *INVITATION*

To depart from this paper I like to invite the reader to consider life with less need for measured empirical proof, as a protection from the unknown, but not to head blindly into the unknown without scrutiny. What I've learned from this research is that often we don't know what we know until we are moving, the ideas shake loose, and we see them outside of us. With brain, mind, body, and embodiment, we have the tools for gathering data and discerning. It's good and often necessary to lean on a teacher, but we can guide ourselves to the place of our joy. There are methods for conversation between body and brain, movement and word, as well as many applications for these skills that anyone can experiment with to stay alert and playful. In the beginning of the paper, I mentioned "300 Inuit Words for *Snow*. For a long time, I've been considered a slow-learner, or a non-linear thinker, which offended the younger me. Finally, I realized that my learning style is like snow. Snow sits on the surface for a long time and ever so slowly melts into the soil, where it can reach tree roots and nourish them. Rain, on the other hand, swiftly runs off in a current because it has no time to soak the soil. When I learn as slowly as snow melting and soaking, more than just empirical data is going into my brain. I'm integrating the pattern of brocades, the scent of my infant siblings, the real experiences and the aesthetic. Perhaps the reason that I'm an artist is that the details have soaked in and must also be transformed in the underneath realms of myself that I can't see.

It makes no difference how you, the reader, interact with your world but *do* find a way to integrate your body and awareness of as many levels of experience as you can fathom. Maybe Dewey left out an experience for you to have and nourish. This level of full body integration is the ultimate evidence of intelligence

because it calls upon the myriad ways we relate to our environments. Speaking from my own experience, thinking through movement is immediately gratifying.

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