

WE DO NOT SEE THE WORLD AS IT IS, WE SEE IT AS WE ARE

(We are the history of our connections. Lloyd Fell)

EMBODIMENT.....IMMERSION.....ABSORPTION

When I think of embodiment I feel.....embodiment isn't a cognitive response, it is kinesthetic and wrapped in sensations and emotions.....emotions triggered by memories. I have physical sensations from inside and out, from head to toe, which, in turn, stimulates memories of sounds and smells.

A warm, spring zephyr wraps and folds me in its gentleness..... blows strands of my hair across my face..... carries suggestions of perfumes and odours from plants and animals.....and perhaps even the hint of rain.....my olfactory senses are on alert to seek the slightest indication of sky-borne moisture to nourish the garden and landscapes. I can feel the softness of each breath over my exposed skin and I smile.

Embodiment is when I am swimming.....lap after lap.....the physicality of repetition.....the encompassing sounds of air being exhaled through my nose causing bubbling noises.....the rhythm that creates the flowing movements that transport the figure through the clear water..... the sensation of my arms moving mechanically in freestyle. Butterfly generates a focus on different areas of my body..... a requirement to focus on other muscle groups in order to defy gravity and gracefully propel my shoulders over the meniscus of the water.....to reach as far forward as I possibly can.....to activate the power in my legs to dolphin-kick and lever my upper body into the next stroke.

The Literal Body of Learning

David Wright (1999) describes this embodiment in his observations of Chinese dancers rehearsing day-after-day, week-after-week.....' *a physical movement that is entered into, a rhythmic flow that has to be performed before it can be fully appreciated...*'

'Repetition was learned, not simply to 'get the movement right', the repetition of physical action is regarded in Peking Opera, according to Sussman, as a way of absorbing information. She claims there is a deliberate attempt, in this training, not to engage the actor in thought. The actor needs only to 'learn' the action in order to repeat it. Hence, the principal form of learning is the learning of the body. The body learns, then contains the information that comprises the style and the role and therefore the performance. *It is the body that enters most fully into this research.* And as the body learns, the body changes as a result of that learning.'

'This cultivation extends beyond the rehearsal room and the performance hall into life. It leads to the identification of the performer with the aesthetic tradition that contains the training, and therefore the learning that has been mastered through the training.

Riding a motorbike

The physical skills of balance and strength, the cognitive skills of literacy and speech and the emotional attributes of vision, persistence, management of pain, fear, confidence and courage have been utilised in my experiences learning to ride and develop superior skills to handle a sports motor bike. The balance and strength were the easy bits. Literacy and speech are second nature. Vision, persistence, confidence and courage are regularly practiced professionally – at the cognitive level. When, however, the physical realm is at stake, more complex dimensions are introduced into the equation.

My first road bike was a 15-year-old galumphing Suzuki GS500. Having ridden horses from the age of three, I used the comparison of this bike being similar to riding a very slow-thinking heavy horse. The bike's weight distribution was clumsy and it only needed the slightest excuse to fall over, sometimes pinning my leg underneath it. When actually mobile, maneuvering it at slow speeds was tortuous. My upper-body strength was tested as I carefully turned the handlebars whilst in first gear to pull up next to the petrol pump.....the slightest hint of slippery surface made me nervous as I soon quickly realised that once it started falling sideways, my legs would be strained beyond their capacity in an effort to keep the bloody thing upright.

It only took three falls in the space of three weeks for my legs to be alerted to the slightest equivocation that would indicate imbalance, and to activate the necessary action to reverse it! Now that response has been replaced with a heightened sub-conscious awareness that actually prevents me from parking in those conditions altogether. This is more than cellular learning – this is now embedded in my sub-consciousness.....beyond conscious response to prevention.

Using this example, then how many times have we all learned through physical means?

An infant learning to walk is one profound incident in our lives that isn't really given much thought – it's just something that every child does in the process of growing up. There is an instinctive drive that literally elevates us to another dimension.....not only is the upright stance preferred but then..... ambulation drives the little body.....exploring.....falling.....bumping heads and well-padded bottoms in the sub-conscious quest to see more of the exciting world. What is the motivating force? Is it curiosity to see and learn more? Is it an innate activity already in our hard-wiring?

If we could remember learning to walk, how could we apply this knowing to other aspects of our lives?

As Confucius said, *“Tell me and I'll forget.....show me and I'll remember..... Involve me and I'll understand.”* What if this concept was applied to adult learning principles as an integral component of any projects, rather than only relying on cognitive, written, left-brain analysis techniques to instigate practice-change.

Perhaps the Landcare movement has been more successful than ever envisaged *because* of the physical component of actually planting trees, erecting fences and walking over the land. Perhaps these activities actually contributed and compounded the learning processes that the participants were already familiar with as basically, we are all physical beings and use our senses and our bodies constantly.

Hypothesising on the basis of biophysical evidence which came from 'sound science', is only one small aspect of the process of learning. Application of the learning is an expectation from policy developers yet there is still speculation as to why uptake of sustainable practices is not more widespread.

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

Sumner'sⁱ (2001) definition of transformative learning, at its most basic level, involves change. Within the literature, this change is often examined from the individual perspective, whether it is people learning on their own or operating as individuals within a group context. For example, Mezirow (1995, p. 48) sees transformative learning as involving “a reassessment of one's self-concept” and “being true to one's self.” When describing transformative group learning, Cranton (1996, p. 30) discusses individuals taking responsibility for their own learning..

Once again, the question arises – what is/are the driver/s behind changing, one's belief systems, habits, speech patterns, activities or eating preferences?

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ⁱ Sumner, Jennifer (2001) *Swimming against the current: sustainable learning in the age of corporate globalisation*; Paper prepared for the Fourth International Conference on Transformative Learning, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto, Toronto, November 1-3, 2001