This article explores the role of intuition as a preconscious embodied state and its implication for adult education.

Intuitive Knowing and Embodied Consciousness

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Imagine you are walking down a dimly lit street in an unfamiliar neighborhood. It is just before sunset and the streets are fairly deserted. Suddenly you hear a loud noise that might be a car backfiring, or it might even be gunshots. Your heart starts racing, your breathing becomes shallow, and you feel as if you may start to hyperventilate. Some instinct tells you to run and leave the area as quickly as possible. You don’t stop to think or reason or figure out what is happening, you just follow your body’s cues and move toward safety. You rely on your intuition.

Intuition

Intuitive knowing is one of the most complex and misunderstood ways of knowing. It is difficult to put into words and verbalize. Intuition has been defined as “the ability to perceive or know things without conscious reasoning” (Webster’s New World College Dictionary); “a way of knowing that transcends intellect and reason” (Vaughan, 1979, p. 111); and “a realization of wholeness which is simultaneously internal and external, it is an event which is both experiential and cognitive” (Blanchard, 1993, p. 10). According to Jung (1964), intuition is one of two ways to gain access to certain experiences or events that are not part of our conscious awareness.

Intuition is spontaneous, heart-centered, free, adventurous, imaginative, playful, nonsequential, and nonlinear (Lawrence, 2009). We access intuitive knowledge through dreams, symbols, artwork, dance, yoga, meditation, contemplation, and immersion in nature. Most of these processes...
call upon embodied knowing. This chapter examines embodied knowing as an intuitive process and discusses how embodied knowledge comes into our conscious awareness, how embodied knowing is connected to other ways of knowing, and how educators can incorporate an embodied pedagogy into their practice.

Embodied Learning by Any Other Name

In addition to the word *embodied*, there are other terms that relate to learning through the body. In his well-known taxonomy, Bloom (1956/1984) discussed the psychomotor domain of learning, which he differentiated from the cognitive and affective domains. Learning in the psychomotor domain includes using one’s body to perform tasks or engaging in physical activity such as throwing a ball or constructing a building. Gardner (1993) talked about bodily-kinesthetic intelligence as one of the nine multiple intelligences that human beings possess. According to Gardner, we all have one or more dominant intelligence areas. Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence involves learning by doing, as in building and making things, muscle movement, dancing, and athletics. It is the preferred mode of many surgeons, builders, and others who work with their hands. Kinesthetic learners prefer to take a hands-on approach to learning as opposed to hearing a lecture or observing.

In a critique of Gardner, Parviainen (2010) argued that bodily-kinesthetic intelligence cannot be separated from spatial intelligence. Dancers and other performers need to perceive and interact with the spaces and others around them, so movement cannot be looked at in isolation.

Freiler (2008) defined somatic learning as “learning directly experienced through bodily awareness and sensation during purposive body-centered movements” (p. 39). Her research participants spoke about “‘being in tune’ to or with their bodies, ‘listening to’ the body as it talks to them and tells them something and ‘being more aware’ of attending to body experiences and one’s surroundings.” Similarly, Stuckey (2009) defined body/somatic knowledge as “learning that comes from the body through engagement with the senses and an increased bodily awareness” (p. 33). Although some writers distinguish between these terms, this chapter uses the term *embodied knowing* with the understanding that it also encompasses these other terms.

Integrated Ways of Knowing

I have been interested in holistic knowing or knowledge at the intersections of body, mind, heart, and spirit and their relationship to intuition for the past decade (see Lawrence, 2008, 2009; Lawrence and Dirkx, 2010). I have developed a working model to help explain these ways of knowing (see Figure 1). The model shows an upside down triangle.
Heart (affective knowledge) and mind (cognitive knowledge) are at the two points at the top of the triangle. The body is at the bottom, and spiritual knowledge is “grayed out” in the center, as it is difficult to grasp but is at the center of all knowledge. Embodied knowing is at the bottom because it is foundational. The most primal way of accessing knowledge is through the body as our earliest forms of knowing are preverbal. Babies know in their bodies when they are experiencing distress or discomfort months or years before they learn the words for these feelings. As babies become toddlers, they explore their world first through touch. While they may hear a parent’s warning not to go near the cactus plant because it can be dangerous, it is not until they experience the prickly sensation directly that they learn to stay away.

Knowledge is present in the body before it reaches our conscious awareness. For example, tension is first experienced in the body as a stiff neck, queasy stomach, or tight jaw. If we examine the sources of this disease, we may be able to trace it to a particular experience or event.
Many of our strong emotions include a physical component. When we are sad or depressed, we feel a heaviness that is palpable. Fear may be experienced by a quickening of the heart rate or hyperventilation. As Parviainen (2010) pointed out, the words *motion* and *emotion* have the same root. When we have strong emotional reactions, we describe the experience as *being moved*.

The spiritual domain “reflects a sense of the sacred, mystery or awe, and is deeply connected with our emotions and our bodies” (Lawrence and Dirkx, 2010, p. 149). For example, a profound spiritual moment may be experienced by unexpected chills, tears, or a felt sense of well-being.

Even cognitive knowledge that appears to be wholly rational on the surface often has affective and somatic components. Mezirow (2000) described disorienting dilemmas, such as death or job loss, that create opportunities for transformative learning. While Mezirow suggested that reflective discourse is the way to move toward transformative learning, these dilemmas always come with emotional and physical dimensions that beg to be resolved at least in part in embodied ways.

**Consciousness**

Although we can talk about these ways of knowing as separate domains, they are very much interconnected and intuitive. Intuitive knowledge exists even before it comes into our conscious awareness. As mentioned, we first experience this knowledge in our body. Crowdes (2000, p. 27) used the term *conscious embodiment*, which “implies an integrity of mind, body and action accompanied by some awareness of the nature of these connections in the broader social context.” Our bodies and the sensations we feel are with us at all times, yet these sensations are often not part of our consciousness. When we are ill or in pain, our attention is drawn to what our body already knows (Stuckey, 2009). For example, most of the time I don’t think about having a nose or the ability to breathe freely. When I have a cold and my nasal passages are blocked, suddenly breathing is all I can think about. According to Ortega y Gasset (1969), there are certain truths that we come to rely on even though we may not have immediate conscious access to them.

> When we discover them for the first time, it seems to us that we have always known them, but had not noticed them; there they were before us, but veiled and covered. . . . [P]erhaps truth is no more than discovery, the lifting of a veil, or a cover from what was already there and on which we were counting. (p. 50)

Damasio (1999, p. 4) defined *consciousness* as “an organism’s awareness of its own self and surroundings.” We come into consciousness first through our bodies. “Consciousness emerges when . . . the story of an object can be told using the universal nonverbal vocabulary of body signals . . . from that moment on we begin to know” (pp. 30–31).
Stanage's phenomenological model (1987) includes feeling, experiencing and what he called *consciousing*. Feelings are prereflective. We have feelings and sensations before we are consciously aware of them. Feelings are not yet knowledge, but they are the foundation for knowledge. Experiencing includes both feeling and embodiment. Stanage coined the term *consciousing*, which he used as a verb. Consciousing, or the process of becoming conscious, encompasses both feeling and experiencing and involves reflection and action or praxis. Embodied knowledge can come from conscious engagement with our bodies such as in yoga or dance (see Chapter Six), or it can emerge from our unconscious states, coming into our awareness through intuitive bodily sensations that give us clues to what we know.

**Getting in Touch with Embodied Knowledge**

Intuition is often expressed as a “gut feeling” or knowledge that is unexplainable. We just know. As there is no rational explanation for how we know, in Western cultures our intuition is often dismissed or not taken seriously. Sometimes this knowledge is just below the surface of our awareness. Getting into our bodies through artistic forms of expression can be a way to get in touch with this hidden knowledge. For example, Stuckey (2009), searching for a way to understand her diabetes, created metaphors to express what her body intuitively knew. “Expression though metaphor is not only a matter of language, but a powerful way to understand the lived experience of the body” (p. 31).

Dance educator Sherry Shapiro wanted her students to understand the concept of women’s silent voices, not only from a conceptual perspective but also from their own experience. She asked them to dance their experience and then reflect on what they learned from their bodies. “The power of drawing upon body-knowledge gave the dancers a new understanding of what this might mean. Rather than their bodies being objects for technical proficiency, they became the vehicle for critical understanding of their life-world” (Shapiro and Shapiro, 2002, p. 37).

Butterwick and Lawrence (2009) discussed how telling stories through popular theater can be a way to surface strong emotions, providing a way to discuss difficult subject matter and even “creating alternative realities” through dramatization. Similarly Horsfall and Titchen of Australia (2009) used performance ethnography as a way to analyze and present research data in a collaborative inquiry of rural women. The issues that came forward were those that had been formerly “swept under the carpet and included domestic violence; indigenous issues; suicide; and sexism in family farm transfers. The unsay-able became said” (Horsfall and Titchen, 2009, p. 157).

These examples illustrate how embodying an experience can be a way to make knowledge accessible, particularly knowledge that is painful or
undiscussable. While these processes can be powerful tools, societal forces mitigate against them.

**Feminism and Resistance: Valuing the Body as a Way of Knowing**

“Bodies hold knowledge that is not yet present in our conscious mind” (Butterwick and Lawrence, 2009, p. 37), yet our Western educational systems still privilege cognitive rationality. It is as if we are being educated from the neck up. Focusing primarily on cognitive knowledge while ignoring what the body knows deprives us of fully actualizing ourselves as human beings. According to Clark (2001, p. 84): “We’re situated in a culture that has a complex and largely troubled relationship with the body. . . . We live much more comfortably in our heads than in our bodies.” Talking about our bodies in educational contexts is largely taboo. Freiler (2008) raised the question as to whether modern civilization has turned us off from embodied knowing. According to Damasio (1999, p. 29), “[W]e sometimes use our minds to hide a part of our beings from another part of our beings.” We ignore signals from our bodies and our emotions. Perhaps this is a protective mechanism to avoid confronting painful truths. Shapiro and Shapiro (2002) suggested that the body is often associated with the feminine. They saw feminist discourse as a way to reclaim the body. “The body-subject in rational discourse has suffered the effects of alienation in its denial of sensual existence and concrete social experience and it has truncated the knowledge of objective and subjective worlds” (Shapiro and Shapiro, 2002, p. 29).

Feminist scholarship challenges objective rationality that has long been associated with male domination. As Michelson (1998, p. 217) whimsically put it, “Knowledge practices that characterize modernity began on the day that Rene Descartes severed his body from his head.” Much of feminist discourse focuses on problematizing and resisting the Cartesian mind/body split, thus reclaiming the body as a source of knowledge. Women, realizing that their association with the body, sexuality, and bodily functions was the source of their oppression, began to speak honestly about their bodies, using this awareness as teaching and learning tools (Clark, 2001). Once women (and probably men as well) begin to be more aware of their body as a teacher, they “cannot return to their former state of unawareness” (Shapiro and Shapiro, 2002, p. 38). This shift in perspective, while still far from universal, holds the potential for an extended epistemology.

**Embodied Pedagogy**

What would a pedagogy that holds embodied knowledge in equal esteem with cognitive knowledge look like? This section discusses how educators
can learn from their students by paying attention to body language and facilitate embodied activities. It then looks at the role of the body in social activism and offers ideas for getting beyond learner resistance.

**Paying Attention to Body Language.** Embodied pedagogy starts with becoming aware of nonverbal cues that students are communicating. Do they look confused, bored, or engaged? I can often tell by the raised eyebrows, frowns, or puzzled expressions when students are not tracking with me or when something I’ve said does not make sense to them. If I pay attention to these nonverbal cues, I can use them as an opportunity to pause, check in, and identify the source of the confusion. If no one raises a question and I just continue on as if nothing happened, I could easily miss a “teachable moment.” This is one advantage of the face-to-face classroom as opposed to the newer online models where such confusion can easily go undetected.

**Facilitating Embodied Activities.** Embodied activities such as performance can “tap into visual, emotional and visceral terrain that is often discouraged or silenced in orthodox academic writing” (Horsfall and Titchen, 2009, p. 158). As discussed, embodying stories through movement, dance, or popular theater can be a way to communicate and make connections to others in ways that are less threatening than expressing them verbally or when the knowledge held in the body is not yet conscious. Embodiment is a form of experiential learning as “our experience of life is inevitably mediated through our bodies” (Shilling, 1993, p. 22).

**The Body in Social Activism.** According to Parviainen (2010), the body plays a major role in social activist work. She observed that words like *movement* and *mobilization* are often used in social change activities in a metaphorical sense, but she also explored a more literal use of the terms. Parviainen (2010) described examples of what she called “choreographing resistances” (p. 316), where people use their bodies as a way to convey a message in social protests. In addition to making a statement to others, the choreography offered the protestors an opportunity to “confront [their] own moral codes and principles behind [their] spontaneous bodily responses” (p. 327), thus providing another avenue for learning.

**Learner Resistance.** While embodied pedagogy opens many doors for learning, educators need to acknowledge that not all learners may be comfortable with this extrarational approach to learning, and some may actively resist (Freiler, 2008). In my own adult education practice, I have encountered learners who are less than enthusiastic about engaging in body movement and theater activities, deeming them a waste of time away from “real” (book) learning. I recognize that many adults are just not comfortable in their bodies, and the idea that learning can occur in the somatic domain is still a foreign concept. In these situations I try to gently move people just a small step out of their comfort zones by starting with very nonthreatening exercises, such as bringing awareness to where their tension is held in the
body, and gradually moving to more challenging activities. Once they get over their initial embarrassment or discomfort, often they are surprised at how much they can learn by actively engaging their bodies.

Sometimes learner resistance to embodiment may be the result of engrained cultural norms and expectations, self-consciousness due to disability or even the result of prior abuse or violation of physical space. Educators need to be sensitive to these experiences and give learners the opportunity to opt out of certain activities.

**Conclusion**

Human movement is a way of making sense that cannot occur in any other way. People bring their whole selves and the sum of their embodied and affective lived experiences to the learning environment. To not honor all of these experiences is to dishonor the learners themselves. All ways of knowing are valid; however, cultures around the world as well as American indigenous cultures rely on a much broader spectrum of epistemologies than mainstream Western culture. As adult educators, we need to acknowledge and validate knowing from a variety of cultural perspectives and incorporate those perspectives into our practice.

This chapter explored embodied knowing as it comes into our consciousness, how we can access this knowledge, and how we can reclaim the body as a source of knowing. It also began to paint a portrait of an embodied pedagogy. The portrait is not yet finished. We have a long way to go before embodied knowing is taken seriously in our curriculum and in our practice. It is my hope that this chapter and those that follow will inspire adult educators to help complete the portrait and perhaps even paint community murals at educational sites around the globe.

**References**


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