

A Woman's Dialogue with her Body

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The basic assumption of my teaching and "in-service study groups", is derived from many years of work as a teacher of physical education, in a variety of different situations. Beginning with teaching in schools, kindergartens, colleges, and "in-service study groups" for teachers and continuing with teaching on the stage where I was trained and accredited as a movement and expressive/creative arts therapist, there is a shared experience. My work has moved back and forth between these two professions; and I've used theoretical, practical, and methodological resources from each field. Each is enriched and varied by the influence of the other.

Person, body, woman, and movement all exist within a social and cultural context and create for each woman, her own subjectivity and her own special ways of experiencing/expressing/deciphering/and teaching the subject matter. I claim here that it is the subjectivity of the teaching instructor that makes possible the teaching/learning experience on various levels, and although these two professions deal with the body and its movement from different aspects and for different purposes, I argue that physical education teachers who have chosen the body as the central tool for education should undergo the kind of experiences which enable them to sense the emotional contents which are hidden and expressed inside both their bodies and the bodies of those they educate.

In the words of Shilder: (1964) "Movement is the great unifying factor of the various parts of the body, in actuality and in the body image". According to him, "Experiences of movement and dance may generate changes in body image even at an older age."

The non-verbal aspects of communication are often more potent than the verbal aspects. Wolfgang (1979) claimed that the student reacts without hesitation and with greater ease on the non-verbal

level. Teachers can increase their awareness: non-verbal communication is “loud and powerful in its silence”, mainly when attitudes and emotions are conveyed to another.

Enhancing awareness of non-verbal communication may therefore, according to Wolfgang, sow the seeds of a more personal approach towards individual and inter-cultural differences, in schools and in education in general. As a dance/movement therapist and pedagogical instructor in physical education, my focus is not simply on the level of physical exercise and training, but also on creating situations that will enable those participating in the “movement experience” to be in touch with their feelings, emotions and the non-verbal world.

The body and its movements are regarded as a “container” of one’s existential stage and, as such, can lead to the unfolding of life experience.

During the last two decades, teachers have been taking an increasingly active role in shaping curricula, while at the same time there has been a growing emphasis on the subjective aspects of the teacher. The teacher is increasingly viewed as a person rather than as a part of the educational system. The development of the curricula is the result of interaction between the teacher’s personality and disciplines taught. Such a shift of approach from an objective, non personal and theoretical curriculum, to a more balanced and holistic one involves the personal and the subjective input of the teacher (Clandinin, 1986; Connolly, 1990; Elbaz, 1983; Cortney, 1990 in Koren, 1992).

I initiated and activated an exploratory in-service study group of physical education teachers for my doctoral thesis. This was conducted within the framework set forth by the Ministry of Education. The name of the course was: “Body image and self image of the physical education teacher as a woman” - intended for religious women who are physical education teachers. Teachers belonging to the Religious-Zionist stream in Israel and who work in religious state schools participated in this group.

The course was made up of 13 sessions, four academic hours each. The approach was based upon the theories of Yona Shahar Levy (1994) who states that movement is a multi-level experience. The integration of the self and the patterns of it’s interactions