

RUNNING HEAD: Embodied Learning Method

Transformative Education: An Embodied Learning Method

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### Abstract

This paper introduces an Embodied Learning Method (ELM) for use in educational settings in which the overarching goals are to promote creativity and personal change in the learner. Because we are embodied beings, our experience of our bodies is the medium through which we attend to physiological, mental, and transpersonal experiences that contribute to personal change. Previous commentators in the fields of transformative and integral education have called for the incorporation of multiple ways of knowing into the learning process; the ELM answers this call. Key principles of the ELM include the human being as a unified whole; connected knowing; the first person agency of the learner; direct experience; flow; presence; and the “transformative self.”

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Most of us generally agree that Descartes got it wrong—that the mind-body split was an act of violence, not a law of nature. How is it, then, that health educators often design health education programming that perpetuates this mind-body split? We provide information; we attempt to reason with our clients and students about what is best for them. In short, we tend to appeal solely to the cognitive function. What if we stopped giving mere lip service to the notion of a mind-body unity, and began to incorporate holistic principles into our methodology as well as the content of our educational programs? And, what if we begin by acknowledging that because the body is the locus of all human experience, and because it is through our experiences that we transform, that the body is also the nexus of transformative learning?

### Introducing the Embodied Learning Method

This paper introduces an Embodied Learning Method (ELM), a somatic methodology for educational settings in which the overarching goals are to promote creativity and personal growth in the learner. Situated within the field of “transformative learning,” a learning process in which the learner is concerned with more than simply acquiring knowledge but also with realizing some type of personal change as a result of the learning process, the ELM facilitates accessing the transformative process through the body.

The word “soma” generally means the first-person, subjective experience of one’s body, in contrast to the word “body” which has a third-person, objective connotation. Thus, a *somatic* methodology is one in which emphasis is given to the subjective experience of the sensations associated with one’s embodiment as well as the emotions, thoughts, and meanings that arise from this subjective experience. By *embodiment*, it is meant “the moment to moment process by which human beings allow awareness to enhance the flow of thoughts, feelings, sensations, and energies through our bodily selves” (Aposhyan, 2004, p. 52). Thus, learning is “embodied” when learners experience such a flow through their bodies during the learning process.

*What the ELM Is Not*

Although the ELM draws heavily upon the field of somatics, it is not a somatics modality. The field of somatics may be broken up into roughly three categories: somatics healing modalities, somatic education modalities, and somatic psychology. *Somatic healing modalities* may be defined as modalities where a practitioner manipulates or acts upon an individual's body at least in part to increase somatic awareness. (Hanna, 1977, p. 48-50; Silow, 2001, p. 15). Examples include structural integration, widely known as "Rolfing," and other forms of integrative bodywork. *Somatic education modalities* are those in which a practitioner teaches an individual greater body awareness and greater control over his or her sensory-motor process in order to correct irregularities or disturbances in the body's functioning (Cheever, 2000; Gold, n.d.; Hanna, 1990). Examples include the Feldenkrais Method, the Alexander Method, and Body-Mind Centering. Finally, *somatic psychology* includes a number of body-centered psychotherapies that focus significantly on somatic experience as an impetus for transformation and healing. Examples include Hakomi, Body-Mind Psychotherapy, and Bodydynamics.

What these three categories of somatics modalities have in common is the underlying conviction that the subjective experience of the body is an important part of the process of change. We develop, grow, and transform as embodied beings, and the various somatics approaches are different ways of working with our embodiment in pursuit of healing and transformation. The ELM takes inspiration from this common conviction, but does not necessarily involve teaching somatics as part of the content. At the heart of the ELM is the simple fact that we live out our lives in our bodies; there is no such thing as a disembodied human life. Our bodies are necessarily the locus of human experience, and therefore of human transformation. We may experience transformation as primarily physical, mental, emotional,

social, or spiritual in nature, but to the extent we are transformed, all such transformation happens in our bodies.

### *Somatic Awareness as a Gateway to Change and Personal Growth*

A core assumption of the ELM is that attempts to introduce change and personal growth into our lives are more likely to prosper when we *embody* them. In other words, the ELM assumes that when we take in information (e.g., reading, listening) while in an embodied state, when we make choices based on an embodied decision-making process, when we process information and choices in an embodied way, the result is more likely to be consistent with our core values and our authentic self and thus more likely to be integrated into our lives.

Embodiment does not come easily for many of us. We all have a complex experience of our bodies that is both subjective and objective (Gerber, 1979, pp. 181-182). An infant's experience is all subjective, though not self-aware. By the time most of us are adults, we have come to view our bodies as "objects" but have forgotten how to be *somas*—subjective experiencers of our own bodies (Whitehouse, 1995, p. 243). However, we all have a kinesthetic sense—the ability to sense our bodies from within—and with practice, we can cultivate the kinesthetic sense through awareness (Silow, 2002, p. 21-26; Whitehouse, 1995, p. 244). The ELM provides a framework for educators who are *not* necessarily somatic experts (i.e., not necessarily somatic healers, registered somatic education practitioners, or body psychotherapists) to facilitate learners' cultivation of the capacity for embodying their learning.

### *Holistic Health Education: The Genesis of the ELM*

This paper emerges from my efforts to provide a map of the territory that I have been exploring for the past four years in my coursework for my master's degree in Holistic Health Education (HHE) with a specialization in Somatic Education. This is a new specialization (I am the first to graduate with it), and the term "somatic education" has not yet been defined in the

context of the HHE program. I began writing this paper about a somatic education approach to working with body image. However, I soon realized that I needed to define what I meant by “somatic education” first. Courses on somatics, somatic psychology, and spirituality and the body have engaged my interest and enhanced my life and personal health, but had not yet given me a clear sense of how my study of somatics informs my approach to health education. This paper explores that question.

The purpose of traditional health education has been “to uncover unhealthy behaviors and recommend alternative, healthier behaviors” (Robison & Carrier, 2004, p. 156). There has been little scholarly attention to educational methodology in the field of health education. In practice, there have been two principal approaches: cognitive and behavioral. First, health educators attempt to provide information calculated to convince the individual to change, consistent with cognitive learning theory as described below. The individual is a passive recipient of the information, with the health educator as the “expert” whose superior knowledge determines the agenda and content of the health education curriculum (p. 162).

Second, health educators attempt to provide adequate rewards and incentives to induce the individual to change, consistent with behavioral learning theory as described below (p. 137-154). The locus of change is seen as lying within the instructor’s ability to implement behavior change techniques to control the individual’s behavior using “fear of disease and death,” as well as shame and guilt, as the key motivating factors (p. 158-159). The behavior modification approach is prescriptive and “teaches people to look outside rather than inside to find out what being healthy really means to them” (p. 164).

I have at least two chief objections to these traditional approaches. First, there is little objective evidence that they are effective, and my personal experience convinces me that long-term change requires an inner commitment that another person can never “teach.” Second, these

cognitive and behavioral approaches demean us by failing to honor our right to self-determination and our ability to define our own priorities and what “health” means to us. Robison and Carrier propose defining health as the ability to “live well” in spite of any adversities that we face (p. 171); this suggests that we each are entitled to define what constitutes living well and what constitutes adversity. Something intangible and very precious is lost every time we allow someone else—even a health educator—to decide how we should live or what choices we should make.

Robison and Carrier (2004) have proposed a new paradigm of holistic health education focused on living our lives with meaning and connection rather than merely the absence of disease and illness. Although Robison and Carrier describe this “profoundly different *approach*” in some detail in terms of content, they outline their educational “*approach*” in only general terms [italics added] (p. 179). They talk in some detail about the new *role* of the health educator as a “compassionate ally” who facilitates individuals’ reconnection with “their inner wisdom” but they do not discuss educational methodology (p. 170, 195). To implement the new paradigm, they emphasize avoiding judgmental, reductionist approaches that seek to “fix” people and blame the victim; cultivating a compassionate, respectful, and connected stance toward the client; and utilizing what they term “holistic counseling strategies” (p. 195-215). However, they are silent with respect to what those holistic counseling strategies are, much less with respect to such issues as learning theories, pedagogical methods, or curriculum design.

This paper, then, picks up where Robison and Carrier have left off by offering a concrete method for providing health education in a way that promotes lasting and meaningful personal transformation. That said, *Embodied Learning* is appropriate to any educational content where the overarching goal is to assist learners in finding and exploring their own transformative edge and in cultivating skills and practices that help them make profound life changes.

## Epistemology and Learning Theories: Grounding the ELM

This section briefly examines theories about how we know and learn before examining two important learning theories that provide the ELM with its inspiration.

### *How We Know and How We Learn*

Learning and educational theories are extensions of their underlying epistemological understanding. *Epistemology* is the study of how we know. Two key epistemological theories may be contrasted for our purposes here: objectivism and constructivism.<sup>1</sup> *Objectivism* is the idea that there is an explicit, objective reality that is knowable and measurable (Halpern, Donaghey, Lamon, & Brewer, 2002, p. 1463; Johnson, 2005, p. 3). Objectivism suggests an educational approach in which the purpose of education is to transfer information accurately, sometimes described as *instructionism*, in which the teacher's activities are the focus, and the learner is a blank slate (Johnson, p. 5).

*Subjectivism*, on the other hand, is the idea that we each construct our own meanings out of our own perceptions and experiences. Educational approaches rooted in subjectivism are said to be forms of *constructivism*, generally defined as a set of “student-centered, student-controlled, process-driven, loosely structured, and highly interactive instructional practices” (Johnson, 2005, p. 8). Constructivism views the teacher as a guide to the learner's process; the learner is the source of knowledge.

Psychologists and education theorists have many theories about how we learn. Behavioral learning theory, for example, emerges from an objectivist epistemology and holds that we learn primarily through the mechanisms of stimulus and response; external reinforcement induces us to learn, and its removal extinguishes learning (Halpern et al., 2002, p. 1459-1461). Cognitive

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<sup>1</sup> This is obviously an overly simplified explanation of epistemology. A detailed exploration of the field of epistemology is beyond the scope of this paper.

learning theory, also rooted in objectivism, holds that our cognitive function takes in new information, relates it to past learning, and stores it in an organized memory for future retrieval (Halpern et al., 2002, p. 1461). Piaget's developmental theory holds that we learn in developmental stages through a complex process of adaptation, in which we assimilate familiar information easily but have to reorganize our mind to accommodate new information. (Halpern et al., 2002, p. 1463-1464; Kelly, 1997, p. 2).

In short, there is a diverse landscape of theories about the complex question of how we learn and the implications for education; exploring the entire landscape is beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>2</sup> Before turning to specific learning theories that influence the ELM, it is important to inquire briefly into the question of *somatic ways of knowing*. Although my research has not revealed any somatic epistemological theories, the entire field of somatics may in some ways be labeled a form of epistemology. Central questions in the field include how we know our bodies, our sensations, our somas, and what it means to know somatically. It is clear that somatic knowing differs from other types of knowing in that it arises from awareness of our embodiment (Hanna, 1984; Matthews, 1998, ¶ 4). Somatic knowledge is knowledge that can be directly experienced and known by the body (Brockman, 2001, p. 329, 331). Somatic knowledge, then, cannot be taught; it can only be learned. The somatic learning process often includes what may be described as an "Aha" experience, namely "an experience that re-organizes one's reality and reframes problems and solutions. An 'Aha' experience provides a different perspective that is

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<sup>2</sup> Gardner (1983) suggested that there are multiple intelligences (MI), including a bodily-kinesthetic intelligence defined as "the ability to use one's body in highly differentiated and skilled ways, for expressive as well as goal-directed purposes ... [and] to work skillfully with objects" (p. 206). It is important to recognize that MI represents a theory of ability rather than an epistemology or learning theory that might guide us in designing pedagogy (Klein, 1997). For example, knowing that an athlete has a high bodily-kinesthetic intelligence level does not inform the coach about the best methods for developing the skills associated with a particular sport (¶ 38). Gardner's ideas have influenced integral thought, especially Wilber's (2000) integral psychology, in which the concept of developmental lines is based in large part on MI theory (p. 29n.2). However, I am intentionally not invoking the idea of MI in shaping the ELM, as I understand the concept of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence to be very different from the skills associated with the somatic awareness that forms the basis of the ELM. Regardless of kinesthetic skill or "ability," we *all* have a kinesthetic sense that can be cultivated to inform our learning process (e.g., Silow, 2002).

outside the initial frame of reference and leads to an expanded understanding of mind-body unity.” (Wilson, Peper, & Gibney, 2003, p. 4). However, somatic learning cannot consist only of such epiphanies; there must be an integration, which, as will be discussed below, is a key goal of the ELM.

Having looked at some questions of how we learn, I will now examine two theories that emerge from the constructivist point of view and are relevant to the concept of Embodied Learning: experiential learning theory and transformative learning theory.

### *Experiential Learning Theory*

*Experiential learning theory* holds that we learn best through direct experience (Kelly, 1997; Kolb, 1984). Learning is “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). The learning process is seen as a reiterative cycle (Kolb, 1984; Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 1997). The cycle always begins with concrete experience, followed by reflective observation, then abstract conceptualization, then active experimentation, only to return again to concrete experience, and so on. The cycle has two linked sets of poles: the two poles of prehension are concrete experience (apprehension) and abstract conceptualization (comprehension), and the two poles of transformation are reflective observation (transformation via internal experience) and active experimentation (transformation via external experience). Each pole corresponds to a different learning style; preferred pedagogical techniques will depend on an individual’s learning style. However, experiential learning theory provides little concrete guidance as to what those learning styles mean for educational methodology (Kolb, 1984; Kolb et al., 1997).

### *Transformative Learning Theory*

*Transformative learning theory*, a branch of adult learning theory, views transformative learning as a process for reshaping our assumptions, beliefs, mindsets, expectations, and

perspectives, generally termed “frames of reference” (Mezirow, 2003). Historically, transformative learning theory has seen the primary task of adult learning as facilitating the development of the “skills, insights, and dispositions” essential to the critical thinking and “reflective judgment” that will transform the learner’s frames of reference (p. 62). More recently, some theorists have suggested that the learning process could involve “extra-rational” ways of knowing and “whole-person learning,” including somatic awareness (Gunnlaugson, 2005, p. 343-344; O’Sullivan, 2003, p. 327). Research did not reveal any specific pedagogical recommendations along these lines, however. Similarly, Ferrer, Romero, and Albareda (2005) describe a “participatory” form of transformative education that includes cultivating “the voice and wisdom of the body, the vital, the heart, intuition, special states of consciousness, and so forth” (p. 3). The ELM offers a framework engaging this “voice and wisdom” of the whole learner.

To summarize, the ELM relies upon ideas found in both experiential and transformative learning theories. Experiential learning theory suggests that learning from experience occurs in a reiterative cycle, alternating between taking in information and processing this information. Transformative learning theory suggests that adult learners can experience profound shifts through the educational process. Transformative learning theorists have begun to recognize that non-cognitive approaches are important in the process of transformative learning; the ELM responds to this recognition by providing such a non-cognitive approach.

### Situating the ELM in Holistic and Integral Theory

I will discuss holistic and integral education approaches, and how the ELM fits within these theoretical frameworks.

*Holistic Education*

In *The Holistic Curriculum*, John P. Miller (1993) articulated a holistic approach to education that purports to educate the whole person.<sup>3</sup> A detailed examination of Miller’s ideas about holistic education is beyond the scope of this paper; with respect to holistic educational methodology, Miller’s key insight is to identify three types of educational methods: transmission, transaction, and transformation.

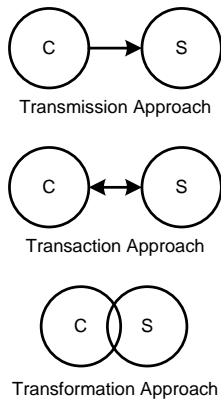


Figure 1. Relationship of curriculum (C) to student (S) in Miller’s three approaches. (Miller, 1993, p. 4-6).

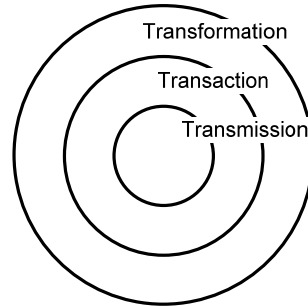


Figure 2. Relationship of Miller’s three approaches (Miller, 1993, p. 7).

The *transmission* approach refers to traditional methodologies such as instructionism as described above. Transmission educational methods are typically calculated to produce “one-way” interactions with the curriculum, with information flowing from the curriculum to the student. The *transaction* approach relates to experiential methods of education as described above (p.5). Transaction is typically focused on problem-solving and interaction with others and the student’s environment, and is designed to produce “two-way” interactions between the curriculum and the student. In the *transformation* approach, the student is seen as a whole with

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<sup>3</sup> Miller (1993) focuses primarily on the content of the holistic curriculum, though he does address methodology intermittently. For Miller, holistic education is about “relationships—the relationship between linear thinking and intuition, the relationship between mind and body, the relationships between various domains of knowledge, the relationship between the individual and community, and the relationship between self and Self” (p. 3).

overlapping and interacting “aesthetic, moral, physical, and spiritual” as well as cognitive needs (pp. 6-7). Transformation may be seen as overlapping circles between curriculum and student in which the curriculum is designed to bring about change in the student and in turn the student’s needs inform and shape the curriculum. The three approaches are diagrammed in Figure 1 above.

Each of these three educational approaches—transmission, transaction, and transformation—builds upon the previous approach (p. 7). Miller conceives of the three approaches as concentric circles, as depicted in Figure 2. Transaction thus includes transmission, and the transformation approach includes both. The transformation approach will necessarily include at times instructionist and experiential pedagogies as well as more transformative methods such as the ELM.

### *Integral Education*

The ELM should be seen as part of an integral approach to education. A key purpose of the ELM, as described below with reference to the “transformative self,” is to accommodate multiple ways of knowing, which is a centerpiece of any integral approach. Moreover, the ELM is designed to promote the type of “embodied creative emergence” that at least one commentator has said lies “at the heart of the Integral” (Grand, 2005, p. 40).

Perhaps the most influential of integral scholars is Ken Wilber; unfortunately, the scope of this paper does not permit a thorough exploration of how Wilber’s Integral Approach, which is both detailed and complex, applies to education. Wilber (2007) uses the term “AQAL,” which is shorthand for “all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all states, all types,” to describe his Integral Approach (p. 66). Esbjörn-Hargens and Zeitler (2007) suggest that if nothing else, every educator who aspires to the label “integral” should be using the “powerful tool” of the four quadrants (p. ix). The quadrants are ways of organizing how we think about the universe, and everything in it, into dimensions of experience: subjective/I (upper left); inter-subjective/We

(lower left);objective/It (upper right); and inter-objective/Its (lower right). Wilber (2007) suggests they can be seen as the inside and outside of the individual (I and It, respectively) and the inside and outside of the collective (We and Its, respectively) (p. 68). Wilber's integral approach parses every event or phenomenon through the lens of the quadrants; they are "four basic ways of looking at anything" (p. 70). Applying that lens to the ELM, there can be no question that Embodied Learning is primarily a subjective phenomenon (UL) in that the key focus is on cultivation of somatic awareness of one's own experience. There are also inter-subjective (LL) elements in that somatic awareness while engaged with others and somatic empathy may be cultivated (e.g., Sublevels 3 and 5 of the awareness level of the Embodied Learning taxonomy described below). See Appendix B for a diagram of the quadrants applied to the learning theories and educational methodologies discussed in this paper.

Wilber himself has written very little specifically about education (Fisher, 2007, p. 1). However, a few writers have attempted to apply Wilber's theories to the field of education in a systematic way. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a literature review or an analysis of all such attempts,<sup>4</sup> those articles I have read apply the AQAL integral approach to education by beginning with highly theoretical discussions of integral theory and then discussing how integral theory should inform whatever curriculum they are designing, such as, for example, elementary and junior high school (Crittendon, 2007), high school (Feldman, 2007), college (Fischler, 2007; Reams, 2007), graduate programs (Esbjörn-Hargens, 2007), and adult education (Gunnlaugson, 2005). Their emphasis is generally on ensuring an integral curriculum in terms of content; in general, little if any attention is given to methodology. These discussions of integral

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<sup>4</sup> An annotated bibliography through early 2007 has been posted on the Internet (Fisher, 2007) and was cited as a positive development in the AQAL Journal (Esbjörn-Hargens & Zeitler, 2007, p. vi).

education are “top-down” in that they begin with theory and then attempt to design educational approaches that fulfill the theory.

Although it too focuses primarily on content and theory, Sean Esbjörn-Hargens’ (2007) article on the Integral Psychology program at John F. Kennedy University does describe an “integral awareness practice” designed to connect the elements of integral theory to “people’s lived experience, direct awareness, and embodied presence” (p. 86). There are ten components to this practice: embodied reading, engaged reading, presence, reflective dialogue, shadow work, inquiry, perspective taking, self-authorship, witnessing, and daily meditation (p. 86-87). There is some overlap here with the ELM. In particular, presence and witnessing are suggestive of foundational ideas of the ELM (namely, presence and the transformative self, both discussed below), while embodied reading is an example of a technique that an ELM educator might introduce depending on the skill level of the learner(s) and the type of educational setting. Although he indicates that time is set aside in class for providing additional instruction on the ten practices and discussing the students’ experiences with respect to the practices, Esbjörn-Hargens places responsibility for engaging in the ten practices on the student (p. 86-88). Because there is relatively little attention to educational methodology, Esbjörn-Hargens’ version of integral education remains a top-down approach. The priority is the theory, not the learner.

Another (non-AQAL) integral approach to education is outlined by Ferrer, Romero, and Albareda (2005). Their view of “integral transformative education” is deeply rooted in methodology. They distinguish three elements of an integral pedagogy: content, training, and inquiry. Akin to the transmission element of holistic education, content-based education refers to the teaching of facts, theories, ideas, models, and so on. Training-based education refers to teaching skills and developing capacities, including (among other things) somatic awareness. Inquiry-based education refers to facilitating “individual and collective inquiry into focused

topics, questions or problems.” Pedagogical approaches for accessing inquiry fall into two categories: “mental/verbal approaches” and “multi-dimensional approaches ... that engage the voice and wisdom of the body, the vital, the heart, intuition, special states of consciousness, and so forth.” Never mutually exclusive, these three methodological areas are all seen as important, though it is expected that there will be a shift in educational approaches from content/training to inquiry/training as the learner approaches adulthood (p. 3).

Integral education is also seen by Ferrer, Romero, and Albareda (2005) as having horizontal and vertical dimensions. The horizontal dimension refers to ways we integrate *knowledge*, such as from the content, training, and mental inquiry elements of education, while the vertical refers to ways that we integrate *multiple ways of knowing*, such as from “special trainings” (e.g., somatic awareness) and multi-dimensional inquiry (p. 4). They elaborate on methodologies appropriate for the horizontal dimension, but not for the vertical dimension, stating that “the greatest challenge of integral education lies in the facilitation of the vertical dimension of learning: multidimensional inquiry or integration of multiple ways of knowing.” The ELM takes up this challenge.

Ferrer, Romero, and Albareda (2005) note that there are generally three types of integral education. The *mind-centered/intellectualist approach* they dismiss as “cognicentrism” in its assumption of the superiority of the mental way of knowing. The *bricolage/eclectic approach* consists of primarily mind-centered education with some “experiential moments or practices” included; this they dismiss as similarly cognicentric. The third approach—their approach—they call *participatory* in that it “seeks to facilitate the cocreative participation of all human dimensions at all stages of the inquiry and learning process.” Moreover, they differentiate their participatory approach from the other two primarily based on methodology and proceed to outline key features of integral education and devise a framework based on the four seasons for inspiring educators

seeking to “cultivate more integral approaches.” While a detailed review of these features and framework is not possible in this short paper, the ELM is consistent with their emphasis on “the inclusion of all human dimensions in the learning process” which “enhances the transformative, healing, and spiritual power of education” (p. 6-8). The ELM is not an “education approach” but rather a *method*, and as such it may serve as an important component of an integral pedagogy in that it accesses ways of knowing other than the cognitive and seeks to integrate such multiple ways of knowing.

*Where Does the ELM Fit In?: The “How of Ourselves”*

The ELM may be seen as a useful method in either a holistic or an integral educational approach. With respect to holistic education, the ELM fits into the transformation approach (third circle) described by Miller, wherein a key purpose is to bring out change in the learner and the curriculum is informed by the needs of the learner. With respect to integral education, the ELM emphasizes accessing the multiple dimensions of human experience in the learning process. It is a methodology for providing non-cognitive, participatory modes of education called for by integral education theorists.

The ELM is both holistic and integral in that it reflects and promotes a deep attention to the process of being human and our embodied engagement with the world, or as Richard Strozzi-Heckler (1984/1993) names it, “the *how* of ourselves” (p. 9). All somatics is, regardless of theoretical background or modality, at essence the study of how we are in the world—how we move, how we think and react, how we relate to others, to the world, and to the environment. While a focus on the “how of ourselves” may take us in a number of directions for exploring the dimensions of our experience, it always returns to the body. Asking “how” we are—and appreciating the answers—are central to uncovering our patterns of mediating our experience of the world (Keleman, 1979, p. 47).

The underlying question of how also reflects something important about the ELM, namely that it is primarily concerned with the “how” and not as much with the what or the why. The why emerges in the ELM, but is not the goal that is pursued. As described above, my motivation to develop the ELM arises out of my interest in defining how somatics can inform my practice as a health educator and coach. Holistic health education directly engages this question of the “how of ourself”; among other things, we seek to understand how we came to be in this specific state of health, how what we do affects our health, and how we can make changes that will enhance our sense of well-being. In this way, holistic health education is as much about method—the “how”—as it is about content.

### Principles of the Embodied Learning Method

In some ways, this is a first attempt at creating a manifesto on somatic education and what that term means, especially in the context of health education. The following categories are foundational concepts for the ELM: it is my contention that any somatically based educational programming should be informed by and include the following inter-related principles.

#### *Human Being as Unity*

It has become common in holistic scholarship to talk about attending to “mind, body, and spirit.” However, to speak of mind and body and spirit as separate things that all need to be considered is to perpetuate the reductionist, Cartesian paradigm. We are a *unity*; it is not appropriate to separate out our bodies from our minds from our souls. We may experience ourselves in terms of different dimensions or aspects, but these are all manifestations of our underlying unified existence.

Flowing from this idea of the human being as a unity are the complementary ideas that (1) what affects one aspect of the unity affects all aspects, and (2) for any transformative learning experience to have a lasting effect, it must be integrated on all levels of the unity. Accordingly,

the ELM seeks to treat each learner as a unified being. Moreover, any ELM lesson plan or curriculum should include experiential work calculated to integrate the “Aha” experiences of somatic learning on the multiple levels of our experience.

### *Connected Knowing*

This idea of unified existence in turns leads to the principle of *connected knowing*. *Somatic awareness*, as that term is used in the ELM, means a sense-based awareness that may occur on any or all of the multiple dimensions of human experience, whether physical, mental, or energetic—a “connected knowing,” if you will. Any time our education methods privilege one aspect of human experience by providing education only for the body, only for the mind, or only for the spirit, we are engaging in and perpetuating the Cartesian, dualistic paradigm rather than a more holistic or integral paradigm (Silow, 2001, p. 18). Thus, with the term *Embodied Learning*, I am expressly not referring to education for the body alone. The learner is always held as a unified whole. The exploration and cultivation of this wholeness is an important part of the ELM. Additionally, wholeness is seen as an unfolding and dynamic process rather than a static condition. The ELM, then, seeks to connect multiple levels of experience through somatic awareness.

### *First Person Agency of the Learner*

A distinguishing feature of somatics as a field of inquiry and practice is the intention to engage a first person, subjective point of view (Silow, 2001). The ELM is an educational model where the learner is an embodied *subject*, rather than an *object* of the educational process. In the ELM, the learner is not just a vessel to be filled with information by the educator, but rather is an embodied agent of his or her own learning process. The word “agent” has a number of meanings, and I expressly intend to invoke several of them here. First, an agent is someone who “acts or exerts power”; second, an agent is someone who “produces or is capable of producing an effect”;

and third, an agent is “a chemically, physically, or biologically active principle” (Merriam Webster Online, n.d.). Thus, the ELM learner is the primary actor whose actions will determine his or her learning experience. Specific techniques should be designed in order that the learner will produce an effect, at the very least on the learner’s experience and often on others’ experience as well. Moreover, in the ELM, the learner is the active principle—the alchemical ingredient without which the learning reaction does not occur. In short, within the ELM, the first person experience is given primacy.<sup>5</sup>

### *Direct Experience—Movement and Sensation*

Another important part of the ELM is the idea of knowing through direct experience. The importance of direct experience emerges naturally from the principle of agency. An individual is likely to learn in a deeper and more embodied way when learning from their own experience than when learning from a retelling of something someone else has experienced. This is not to say that narrative and theory have no place in the ELM; they are necessary parts of any pedagogy. However, experiential learning that engages the unity of the learner is given primacy in the ELM.

Deep attention to the body is necessarily an important part of any Embodied Learning approach. “Because it is literally in the flesh, blood, and bone of things that we act out our changes, it is natural to use the body to pay attention to ourselves as we expand, contract, and move throughout our lives” (Strozzi-Heckler, 1984/1993, p. 21). This is not to say that the body takes precedence over our mental and spiritual experiences. Rather, because we are embodied beings, the soma—the first person experience of the body—is the medium through which we attend to such mental and spiritual experiences.

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<sup>5</sup> As noted above, this feature of the ELM (first person subjectivity), among others, serves to balance the limitations of instructionist methods which typically take on a third person point of view. In integral terms, the ELM’s subjective and inter-subjective qualities place it within the UL and LL quadrants, balancing out instructionist methods which are typically located in the UR and LR quadrants. See Appendix B.

We cultivate this deep attention to the body by engaging in a wide variety of movement experiences, including breathwork, vocalization, touch, and stillness in addition to what we usually think of as movement (McHugh, 2005; Silow, 2002). Whether the educational content relates to holistic health, creative writing, ecology, or another subject that calls for transformative learning, our somatic awareness grounds us and allows us to engage the material with our whole selves. By attending to our somatic experience, “we can participate in our life, and by doing this we can learn from our experience” (Strozzi-Heckler, 1984/1993, p. 63). The level of engagement required for transformative learning in turn requires direct experience, which is by definition embodied experience. This idea is at the heart of the ELM.

### *Presence and Flow*

Being in the present moment makes it possible for us to experience a direct form of knowing and learning that empowers us to be the agents of change in our lives (Strozzi-Heckler, 1984/1993, p. 12-13). As anyone who has cultivated a somatics-based personal practice can attest, it is impossible to attend to the sensations of our soma from the past or the future. True transformation occurs in the *now*, and thus presence is a fundamental component of the ELM.

When we fully engage with our experience in the present moment, we experience what may be called *flow*. Although flow can occur in any of a myriad of human activities, it always “provide[s] a sense of discovery, a creative feeling of transporting the person into a new reality” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 74). Flow experiences are most likely to occur in situations where we are fully committed on all levels of experience, including somatically, to engaging in activities for their own sake rather than for the sake of extrinsic rewards. (Matthews, 1998). The ELM assumes that when we are fully embodied at any given moment, we are more likely to access the sense of discovery and creativity of flow. Educators should also consider eliminating

extrinsic factors, such as grades or evaluations, that might impinge upon the learner's ability to engage with the material with a full commitment to its intrinsic value.

### *The Transformative Self*

The ELM takes as given that we have an aspect of our existence that transcends the definition or categories of body, mind, or spirit. It is that aspect of ourselves that is self-aware and conscious, that self-reflectively experiences sensations, that is present in both our dreams and in waking life, that is engaged during flow experiences and present when we have transcendent and numinous experiences, and that exists always in the present, never in the past or the future. This is the self that both includes and transcends all aspects of our experience, and this is the self that is capable of true transformation.

As described above with respect to the concept of a unified human experience, we can try to change our mind or change our body, but these changes are destined to remain superficial until we integrate change into this aspect of self, which I have called the *transformative self*. The transformative self is the learner contemplated by the ELM. Silow (2002) describes this aspect of self as “a becoming, not a static or unchanging structure” (p. 39). Using the word “transformation” connotes a significant becoming, a shift that denotes more than a mere change of habit or mere expansion of our memories. The transformative self has the capacity for engaging in integrated, multi-level, permanent change on all dimensions of human experience.

Ken Wilber (2001) (borrowing from St. Bonaventure) describes “three eyes,” namely “three modes of attaining knowledge”: the eye of flesh, the eye of mind, and the eye of contemplation (p. 2-7). The eye of flesh represents knowledge of the exterior, empirical knowledge that we may know with our senses; the eye of mind represents interior knowledge, namely our way of knowing represented by intellect, reason, and emotion; and the eye of contemplation represents a transcendent or transpersonal knowing. Each of these ways of

knowing “transcends and includes” the former. The eye of mind *transcends and includes* the eye of flesh, and the eye of contemplation *transcends and includes* the eye of mind. The transformative self has access to all these ways of knowing, though we may call the transformative self different things when we are referring to each type of knowing.

Wilber (2007), relying upon what he terms “the wisdom traditions,” suggests another way of thinking about the transformative self as well, namely three states of consciousness: the *gross body*, the *subtle body*, and the *causal body*, which correspond respectively to the ways of knowing represented by the eye of flesh, eye of mind, and eye of contemplation. By “body,” Wilber is referring to “a felt energetic component, an embodied feeling, a concrete vehicle that provides the actual support for any state of awareness.” The gross body is the physical, sensing body. The subtle body is the body of “light, energy, emotional feelings, [and] fluid and flowing images.” The causal body is the formless state of conscious beyond any egoic self, a “Ground of Being” which Wilber poetically calls “the finest, most subtle experience possible, a great formlessness out of which creative possibilities can arise” (p. 54-56).

Corresponding to each of these respective ways of knowing and states of consciousness, we can perceive three aspects of the transformative self which may be labeled the *soma*, the *dreambody*, and the *bodyspirit*. Each aspect is discussed below, and summarized in Table 1.

*Soma*. As discussed above, the *soma* is the subjective experience of our own bodies. The transformative self may be referred to as *soma* when we are exploring sensation and cultivating somatic awareness.

*Dreambody*. Jungian psychotherapist Arnold Mindell has advanced the concept of the *dreambody*, which, though it includes “the individual experience of the body” (1998, p. 47), also includes something more: “The dreambody is the part of you that is trying to grow and develop in this life. The dreambody is your wise signaler, giving you messages in many different

dimensions. When it signals to you in the body, we call it a symptom. When it signals to you in a dream, we call it a symbol” (2002, p. 33). In this sense, the dreambody transcends and includes the soma as it takes on an energetic quality in addition to the flesh of the body and the sensations it produces. Somatically, the dreambody is the nexus of the physical body, our somatic awareness, and our thoughts, dreams, and imaginings that flow from our somatic awareness. Cognitively, the dreambody is the self who knows that it knows—the self-reflective being that is always present. Emotionally, the dreambody is the infinitely compassionate witness capable of unconditional love for self and others. The dreambody is also the poet within each of us, that aspect of ourselves that responds to and communicates using metaphor and image.

In simplified terms, Mindell is interested in what comes out of the dreambody—what are the meanings being expressed by the dreambody that help us to understand and interpret our experience? How can the dreambody tell us what is going on with ourselves? The ELM considers the reverse: how can we educate the dreambody? How can we, through a combination of educational methodology and content, reach someone on the level of metaphor and somatic experience represented by the dreambody?

*Bodyspirit.* The eye of contemplation (or “essence”) represents that spiritual dimension of human learning potential which is not easy to address in traditional educational terms. Sometimes described as a Higher Self, Spirit, or Soul, it is able to hold the unitive perspective and the knowledge that we are connected on all levels or aspects within ourselves and also to the larger universe. This aspect of the transformative self is also able to access the collective unconscious, tapping into ancient and timeless wisdom. Suzanne Lovell (2001) uses the term *bodyspirit* to signify that we are a unified whole, that we are born as “indivisibly metaphysical beings” (p. 5). The bodyspirit is also that part of ourselves that is able to connect with the mystical or numinous threads of the universe. Mystery must be part of transformative education;

as Lovell reminds us, “[m]ystery offers the balance needed to offset the delusions that we can know everything we need to know intellectually” (p. 10).

Table 1.

<b>Ways of Knowing</b>	<b>States of Consciousness</b>	<b>Aspects of Transformative Self</b>
Eye of flesh: Empirical; Senses;	Gross body: Physical body	<i>Soma</i>
Eye of mind: Cognitive/Emotional; Mind	Subtle body: Light; energy; emotions; images	<i>Dreambody</i> Also: Poet (self that responds to metaphor); Self-reflective mind
Eye of Essence: Transcendent; Spirit/Soul	Causal body Formlessness; Ground of Being	<i>Bodyspirit</i> Also: Higher Self; Collective unconscious.

Conceiving of the learner as a soma, and a dreambody, and a bodyspirit reminds us to include educational techniques and methods designed to reach the transformative self whom we seek to educate in the ELM. It is on the level of the transformative self that we are able to make meaningful changes and make choices based on all of ways of knowing.

### Developing An Embodied Learning Taxonomy

A taxonomy is, generally speaking, a system for categorizing. In the field of education, various taxonomies have been suggested for categorizing learning objectives. Each lower level represents a more basic or “entry-level” set of skills that generally must be mastered before moving on to the next level. For example, in Bloom’s taxonomy, a well-known method of classifying levels of learning within the cognitive domain, knowledge and comprehension must precede application or analysis (Atherton, 2005). Each higher level includes the lower levels; application is not possible without comprehension and knowledge. Learning taxonomies for affective and psycho-motor learning domains have also been developed. The three traditional taxonomies—cognitive, affective, and psycho-motor—are outlined below in Figure 3:

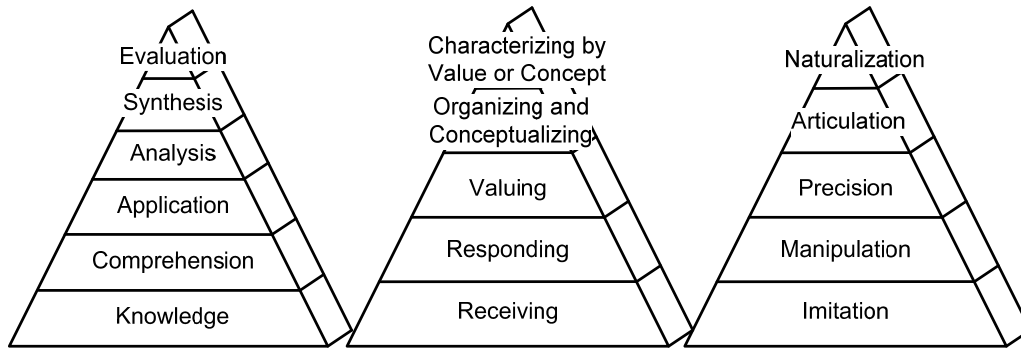


Figure 3. Traditional Taxonomies for Cognitive (Bloom’s) (left), Affective (center), and Psycho-motor (right) Learning Domains. (Atherton, 2005).

Although these traditional taxonomies are useful for curriculum planning in a variety of education settings, they fall short when it comes to understanding levels of experiential learning.

*Experiential Learning Taxonomy*

A less well-known “Experiential Taxonomy of Education” has been developed to talk about levels of learning for experiential education (Steinaker & Bell, 1979). There are five stages or levels in the taxonomy as shown in Figure 4 below:

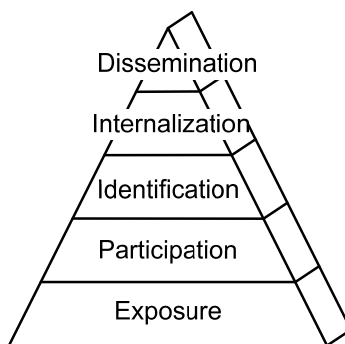


Figure 4. Experiential Taxonomy of Education. (Steinaker & Bell, 1979).

The first level of the Experiential Taxonomy is “exposure.” The participant is exposed to the possibility of the experience. There are three sub-levels: sensory input, response, and readiness; as one moves through these levels, one learns about and then either prepares for the experience or rejects the possibility of the experience.

The second level of the Experiential Taxonomy is “participation,” described as “the *decision* to become physically a part of an experience” [italics added] (p. 10). Clearly, the taxonomy is more concerned with the mental attitudes toward participating than with the nature of the participation itself. The two sublevels of participation are representation and modification. Representation involves a mental image of the experience through visualizing or role playing. Modification involves moving “from role player to active participation” by interpreting and assigning meaning to the experience (p. 10). This definition of “active participation” is mediated by the mental function; there is no mention of participation on a somatic level here.

The third level of the Experiential Taxonomy is identification, which consists of “the coming together of the learner and the idea (objective) in emotional and intellectual contexts for the achievement of the objective” (p. 11). Again, this process of identification is completely cognitive; there is no mention of identification on a somatic or spiritual level. The learner begins to identify with the *mental* representation of the experience (“idea”) and puts it into a *mental* (“emotional and intellectual”) context. There are four sublevels within the identification level: reinforcement, emotional, personal, and sharing. During these four stages, the participant gradually identifies with the experience on emotional and cognitive levels and moves to talking about it with others (p. 11).

The fourth level of the Experiential Taxonomy is internalization. Here, the experience has clearly produced a shift in attitudes and behaviors. There are two sublevels within the internalization level: expansion and intrinsic. In the expansion level, the experience expands into different aspects of participant’s life, changing attitudes and activities. The participant moves into the “intrinsic” sublevel when the changes become more permanent.

The fifth level of the Experiential Taxonomy is Dissemination, with two sublevels: informational and homiletic. In the informational sublevel, the participant informs others about

the experience to try to persuade other to seek out an equivalent experience. In the second sublevel, “homiletic” (meaning preachy or sermonizing), “the participant sees the experience as imperative for others” (p. 11).<sup>6</sup>

My chief critique of the Experiential Taxonomy, as should be clear from the foregoing description, is that it is primarily concerned with cognitive and emotional experiencing, and does not address somatic experiencing. As such, it is not particularly useful for the ELM educator. The following Embodied Learning Taxonomy is a categorization of levels or stages of somatic learning to supplement other taxonomies and provide ELM educators with guidance in designing curricula and lesson plans. It should be appreciated that as a first attempt, I expect that this taxonomic model will continue to evolve as the ELM is practiced by myself and others.

#### *Embodied Learning Taxonomy*

As described above, the purpose of an educational taxonomy is to identify a sequence of learning objectives. Each subsequent higher level of the taxonomy builds upon the skills and practices learned in the level below. For Embodied Learning, then, the question is which skills and practices are foundational, belonging at the base of the taxonomy, and which are more rarified, belonging at the higher levels of the taxonomy. The following taxonomic levels are based upon my own personal practices as well as my understanding of the field of somatics. I look forward to feedback from others in this field and so to further refinements of the Taxonomy.

As shown in Figure 5 below, the levels of the Embodied Learning Taxonomy are: Awareness, Processing, Integration, and Transformation. As noted above, experiential learning can be a reiterative cycle as the learner’s experience often deepens upon repetition. Thus, the same learner may progress through the taxonomic levels multiple times, especially the first two

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<sup>6</sup> The homiletic sublevel, insofar as it sounds more like proselytizing than learning, would seem to contradict the constructivist educational theory out of which it arises. In the constructivist view, we each “know” our own reality based on our individuated learning; this suggests that it would be inappropriate for me to believe that others “must” share the same experience as myself.

levels of awareness and processing, which function as a reiterative loop, before moving on to the higher levels of integration and transformation, as shown by the arrows in Figure 5.

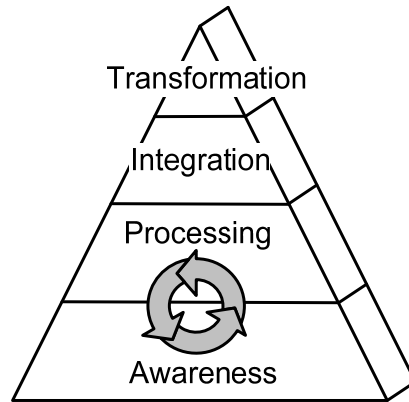


Fig. 5. Embodied Learning Taxonomy.

*Level 1: Awareness.* The learner cultivates the ability to stay present with sensation in a variety of experiences (sublevels). Significantly, although the sublevels do represent a progression of complexity, different learners will respond differently to different activities (sublevels) and may have more capacity at one sublevel than another sublevel for reasons intrinsic to each learner. Developing the skill of “awareness” sounds deceptively simple, but can be a tremendously difficult and complex task. Through awareness, the learner connects with the Inner Witness who represents the perceiving aspect of the Transformative Self. Awareness progressively deepens and expands as the learner loops through the first two levels.

The five sublevels in Level 1 are breath, movement, engagement with others, strong emotional reactions, and somatic awareness of others. Again, unlike the levels of the taxonomy, these sublevels of Level 1 should not be seen as a progression. A learner may progress to Level 2 after engaging in experiences in only one sublevel; alternatively, a learner may engage with more than one sublevel simultaneously. They are ranked in order of complexity based on my experience and judgment.

Sublevel 1 includes all forms of breathwork, from natural breath to a variety of structured breath exercises. Although I consider breathwork to be a form of movement, I have given it its own sublevel for two reasons. First, breathwork is foundational; I consider it to be the most important of all activities and an awareness of breath is necessary for engaging in any of the other sublevels of Level 1. Second, breathwork is more accessible than many other forms of movement. New learners who are tentative or fearful of what movement might mean will often be more open to working with breath, which can open the door to transformative learning through somatics.

Sublevel 2 includes awareness of inner sensation during movement of other kinds, including walking, spontaneous movement, and movement to music. Sublevel 3 represents awareness of inner sensation while engaging with others, such as through eye contact, dialogue, movement, or touch. Sublevel 4 represents awareness of inner sensation when the learner is experiencing a strong emotional reaction of some kind, such as may be triggered by an event, a person, or a memory.

Finally, Sublevel 5 represents awareness, based on inner sensation, of others' experience. This sublevel is distinct from sublevel 3, where the learner is attending to his or her own experience while engaged with another. In sublevel 5, the learner is attending to the other's experience via awareness of what is going on in the learner's soma; the learner's sensing informs the learner about what the other is experiencing. This is the cultivation of somatic empathy, which represents the most complex of the sublevels. To reiterate, however, a learner need not attain any particular level of complexity in order to progress to Level 2.

*Level 2: Processing.* Processing represents the ability to retain the experience of awareness and explore it later. The Inner Witness becomes more skilled and is able to attend to the experience after the fact in terms of understanding its parameters. There are two sublevels:

exploration and communication. Exploration of the parameters of the awareness experience of Level 1 is a necessary part of processing. Parameters to be explored include thoughts, emotions, and images that arose during the awareness of inner sensation. Forms of processing may include reflection, movement (e.g., authentic movement), artwork, verbalization through dialogue or journaling/poetry. Authentic Movement is a form of dance therapy in which an individual moves in response to internal sensations, thoughts, and emotions. Authentic Movement is part of Processing (Level 2), as it involves not just awareness of inner sensation, but movement in response to that awareness, which is a form of processing. Verbal processing in the exploration sublevel may be in mere words or phrases rather than in full sentences.

It is in the second sublevel of Level 2, namely communication to one or more others, that coherent languaging of the experience often occurs. Effective communication of the awareness experience(s) of Level 1 and of the exploration experience(s) of Level 2 requires more thorough processing than mere exploration alone. Here the learner has the ability not only to process the experience fully, but to recreate the experience for others. The communication may take the form of language (e.g., monologue, dialogue, writing essays or compositions), dance, artwork, or other creative ways that the learner may have of expressing the experience to others. Communication is more important in certain settings than others. In the arts, the communication sublevel is the stage where the artwork is produced. In academic settings, the learner must have some way of demonstrating competency in order to receive credit for coursework. However, the communication sublevel is not necessary in order for the learner to progress to the next level.

*Level 3: Integration.* During the integration stage, the learner relates the somatic experience(s) and the information that has emerged during the processing stage(s) to past experience and current understandings, as well as to all aspects of the transformative self, and incorporates the new experience(s) into identity. In this stage, changes in thoughts, attitude,

beliefs, and behavior are present. The learner may be making significant life changes based on the integrated learning. The changes themselves may appear either subtle or dramatic to others, but are experienced as meaningful to the learner. It is generally only through “repetitive, incremental, and self-organizing” somatic experiencing and processing on Levels 1 and 2 that integration is made possible (Levine & Macnaughton, 2004, p. 373). This reiterative learning cycle is represented in Figure 5 by the arrows rotating through Levels 1 and 2. Only rarely will a single experience result in an integrative change on Level 3.

An Embodied Learning educational process may satisfactorily end at Level 3, namely with integration of experience into the transformative self, after which consistent shifts in attitudes and behavior are evident. The ELM is a process, not a destination. Its purpose is to facilitate Embodied Learning, which if done properly will have certain (hopefully) predictable results, namely awareness, processing, and integration. As shall be discussed in the next section, although this paper is called “Transformative Education” and although personal transformation may be highly desirable, the purpose of the ELM can never be transformation in and of itself.

*Level 4: Transformation.* At this level, the learner undergoes profound life changes, experienced by the learner as deeply meaningful on a spiritual or transpersonal level. Somatic experiencing (awareness, processing, and integration) alone may or may not be enough to bring about such a fundamental transformation. The cultivation of somatic awareness, processing those awareness experiences, and integrating them into the transformative self are necessary, though probably insufficient, conditions for transformative change.

It is important to distinguish between the epiphanies or “Aha” moments of somatic experience—what Michael Murphy (1992) calls the “all-at-once response” to transformative practices—and true transformation. Even transcendent and numinous experiences, some of which

can feel earth-shattering in their intensity, do not always result in lasting shifts.<sup>7</sup> Breakthrough experiences can, however, facilitate the transformative process by offering glimpses of what may lie ahead that motivate us to cultivate more deeply the practices that led to these moments. Moreover, insights gained from breakthrough experiences may give us feedback to confirm the path we are on or to point us in new directions. These moments—whether of bliss, awe, oneness, connection, or something else—may serve as lodestars, guiding us in the learning process.

Pursuing the goal of transformation in the belief that having a spiritual experience makes one a better person in and of itself is at best a fruitless endeavor. There are some destinations that cannot be reached by a direct route, and in my opinion, deep and genuine personal transformation is one of them. Moreover, as Jorge N. Ferrer (2002) warns, we must be wary of the dangers of spiritual narcissism, which he defines as “the misuse of spiritual practices, energies, or experiences to bolster self-centered ways of being” (p. 35). Michael Murphy (1992) also warns of the dangers of pursuing transformative practices, which include reinforcing limiting traits, supporting limiting beliefs, subverting valid growth, and limiting integral development. Murphy’s solution for avoiding these pitfalls of pursuing transformation for its own sake is to engage in integral practices that do not focus exclusively on any one domain of human experience (p. 556). By accessing multiple ways of knowing, the ELM is such an integral practice. Moreover, by advancing the ELM, I am not recommending engaging in somatic practices to the exclusion of other learning domains. Rather, Embodied Learning is envisioned as *part of* a diverse holistic or integral learning experience.

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<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Jorge N. Ferrer (2002) points out that the purpose of engaging in a spiritual practice is not to have spiritual experiences but “to live a spiritual life” (p. 37). The analogy is clear: a somatic “Aha” moment can never substitute for integrated, embodied learning.

The Role of the Educator in the ELM

The role of the educator in the ELM is to help the learner become more “literate” with respect to the learner’s internal landscape. The educator is more of a facilitator or guide to the learner’s own experience than a teacher in the instructionist sense of the word. When using ELM techniques, the educator seeks to foster skills and capacities rather than impart intellectual content. A comparison between the educator’s role in a holistic or integral education setting in which the ELM is used and an instructionist teacher’s role is shown in Figure 6 below:

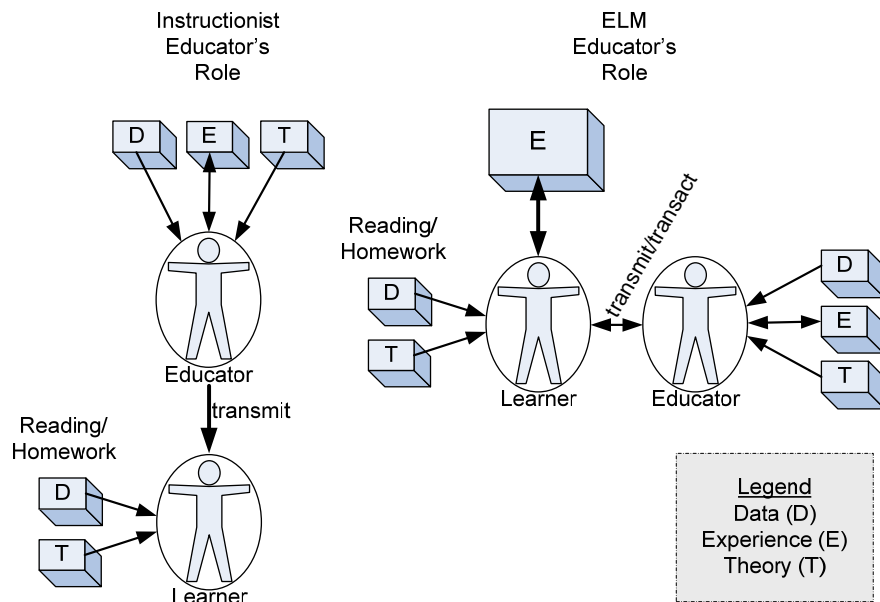


Figure 6. Comparison of educator’s role in instructionism and in a holistic or integral education setting where the ELM is used.

Much of what an educator using the ELM does is in the nature of a “role model” who is well-versed in his or her own somatic practice. Ideally, the educator will have significant experience with at least the first three levels of the Embodied Learning Taxonomy. The educator should be skilled at cultivating somatic awareness and processing and integrating those experiences. The educator must be able to communicate the nature of somatic experience fluently to the learner. Additionally, the educator should have faith in the transformative power

of somatic methodologies and be able to communicate that belief, which may best be instilled by personal experience at the fourth level of the taxonomy.

Somatic empathy is an important capacity for the ELM educator, who must be able to communicate on a somatic level with the learner. Thus, the ELM educator must be at home in his or her body, and capable of attending to the state of his or her own body at the same time as attending the somatic state of the learners. Often our reaction to another person is due in part to our experience of the other's unconscious process (Mindell, 2002, p. 58). The ELM educator should assume that learners will sense the educator's unconscious process. Accordingly, it is important for the educator's pedagogic intention to be as authentic and aligned as possible with the educator's own somatic state. The somatic educator must model somatic awareness and responsiveness. In short, walking our talk is more important than the talk itself when it comes to somatic techniques.

Presence and empathy are important parts of the ELM educator's qualifications. These qualities, too, may be cultivated on a somatic level. John Lee (1994) communicates the importance of the somatic educator's ability to be present while witnessing students' emotion:

“By breathing fully, these listeners allowed our pain to pass out of us. They didn't absorb our pain; they only listened with respect. I try to practice this when I do emotional release work in workshops. When I take full, deep breaths while someone else is experiencing wave upon wave of grief, I'm communicating that I not only encourage and welcome what that person is feeling, but also that my own body will survive the process intact. In our search for mentors, we must bear in mind that we need the support of people who *live* in their bodies, who aren't just visitors in their own skins.” (p. 23)

Indeed, there is a vast literature in somatic psychology talking about how the therapist uses her own body in the therapeutic relationship; a somatic educator must do the same thing.

Most importantly, ELM educators must be able to use their bodies to develop somatic empathy with students by using rhythm, breath, and nonverbal communication (Stark, Aronow, & McGeehan, 1989, p. 128). Cheever (2000) has described how an effective somatic educator cultivates “a special kind of empathy that involves a bodily based sensing of one’s own and another’s somatic experience” (p. 16). Cheever suggests that somatic empathy requires of the somatic educator not only the ability to sense and move in the educator’s own body, but to ability to sense what the learner’s “body/mind might need to learn” (p. 18). Similarly, educators using the ELM must embody the principle of agency by experiencing not only their own bodies subjectively but those of the learners as well.

### *Standards of Conduct*

In a transformative learning context, there are certain ethical considerations that may arise that are not necessarily an issue in the traditional classroom. Thus, in addition to those standards of conduct which may be recommended for any educator in any setting, the ELM educator is recommended to keep the following guidelines in mind. These guidelines are inspired, with appropriate modifications, by guidelines that have been recommended for body psychotherapists (Mcnaughton et al., 2004), and by the guidelines promulgated by the International Somatic Movement Education & Therapy Association (ISMETA), which licenses registered somatic movement educators and registered somatic movement therapists (e.g., Alexander, Body-Mind Centering, etc.) (ISMETA, n.d.):

- 1) ELM educators are not qualified to diagnose or treat medical or psychological conditions and should refrain from speculating on a learner’s physical, mental, or spiritual condition.
- 2) ELM educators should cultivate an awareness of their own boundaries and those of the learner. ELM educators should respect the appropriate boundaries of the educator/learner relationship, and should make every effort to:

- a) Recognize that every learner has personal limitations and be respectful of such limitations.
  - b) Recognize that educators may be in a position of undue influence over a learner and avoid exploiting this position in any way.
- 3) ELM educators should respect the confidentiality of a learner's personal information that may be revealed in the course of the learning process.
  - 4) ELM educators should not engage in any behavior or activity that demeans or disrespects the learner.
  - 5) ELM educators should only use touch in the learning environment when the learner is comfortable with such use of touch, whether from the educator or fellow learners. Options for engaging in the learning experience without use of touch should always be provided. In most cases, and whenever there is any question, the ELM educator should ask permission prior to touching a learner. Sexual intimacy is never appropriate in the ELM setting.
  - 6) ELM educators should clearly identify and give credit to ideas, techniques, and principles of others where appropriate.
  - 7) ELM educators should provide adequate explanation and education regarding somatic methodologies to be practiced in the education setting.
  - 8) ELM educators should caution learners that in a transformative learning process, strong emotional reactions may occur, and when appropriate provide pedagogical options to learners who may become overwhelmed or wish to opt out of any learning process for any reason.

#### Suggestions for Techniques and Methods

It is neither possible nor appropriate to create a generalized curriculum for the ELM. As Murphy (1992) has suggested, there should be an improvisational quality to any truly integral transformative practice that evokes a learner's "sense of adventure" (p. 584-85). Moreover,

transformative practices should knock us off-balance, but not too much. The ELM educator should attend to the needs of the learner(s) and include ELM-based activities as part of an integral approach to whatever subject is being taught responsive to those needs. The ELM educator should make it a priority to provide a safe container for the deep and often chaotic feelings and sensations that can emerge during somatic cultivation by facilitating the development of somatic resources that enable the learner to tolerate and process the emergent experience (Silow, 2002, p. 210).

Accordingly, the ELM educator may include the following types of activities:

- (1) Breathwork, with various objectives, including fostering basic awareness of body sensations.
- (2) Body scans, to heighten awareness of body sensations.
- (3) Directed sensing work for the purpose of providing containment for emotions, memories, and thoughts associated with the learning process.
- (4) Movement of all kinds, whether spontaneous or directed, with music or in silence, in groups of various sizes or individually, as well as Authentic Movement.
- (5) Somatic resources, including centering, grounding, balancing, and cultivation of more individualized somatic resourcing capacities.
- (6) Use of one or more somatic education systems, such as those developed by Bartenieff, Feldenkrais, or Alexander.
- (7) Games that involve the body and movement.

(Bloom, 1998/2004; Hendricks & Hendricks, 1983; Stark et al., 1989).

### The Soma as a Gateway to Multiple Ways of Knowing

This paper has been an exploration of Embodied Learning. Transformative learning theorists believe that we can structure educational programs to bring about changes in

perspectives and behavior in learners. Somatics practitioners believe that the locus of human experience is always the body, and that somatic awareness is a powerful tool for healing and change. Holistic education theory suggests that we should educate the whole person, and that we should incorporate transformative as well as transaction and transmission methodologies.

Integral education theory proposes that transformation emerges when the multiple dimensions of the human experience are engaged in the learning process. The Embodied Learning Method lies at the intersection of all these ideas and gives educators a method for facilitating learners' access to multiple ways of knowing in order to ground and deepen the learning process.

As a holistic health educator, I am interested in helping learners to live lives replete with meaning and connection. The ELM represents many of my ideas about how that may be accomplished in terms of pedagogy. I do not mean to suggest that a somatics-based methodology replaces the holistic-health-based content that I teach. Rather, the ELM is a way of accessing the transformative self who can engage with that content in a more meaningful and connected way that goes beyond what any cognitive or behavioral approach to health education can accomplish.

Professionally, I am also a holistic health coach. Although the ELM is presented in this paper in terms of "education," many aspects are applicable to the coaching paradigm. The content of the coaching session is determined by the "coachee," but the overarching purpose of the coaching relationship is generally to facilitate change. Coachees hire coaches when they want to make changes in their lives and find new ways to make choices about those changes. The Embodied Learning Method presented here is also appropriate for coaches to employ in their coaching sessions to facilitate the coachee's ability access multiple ways of knowing.

As I have said, this paper is a first "manifesto" that outlines a method for bringing Embodied Learning into an educational process. There is much more to be done, including (at least) the following tasks:

- Develop a more detailed and systematic somatic epistemology to further our understanding of how we know somatically.
- Identify and catalogue various somatics-based techniques with descriptions of when they might be useful for the purposes of the ELM.
- Describe how to bring the ELM into wide variety of different educational settings (elementary, high school, college, graduate school, adult learning, and others).
- Refine the ELM based on feedback from my own professional experience and from other educators who use it.

Somatic educator and coach Richard Strozzi-Heckler (1984/1993) criticizes traditional education settings in favor of an educational environment “where the principles of grounding, energy, centering, expression, balance, contact, relaxation, skillful action, and positive receptivity are learned through the body” (p. 13). It has been the purpose of this paper to provide a somatics-based methodology, the ELM, that contributes to such an environment. Based first and foremost on my own experiences as a learner and an educator, and secondarily on the wisdom of various somatics experts as documented this paper, the ELM begins not with a theoretical landscape into which it must fit, but with somatics-based principles derived from experience. Somatics pioneers have called for an ethic of self-responsibility in our educational system (Hanna, 1984, p. 6; Strozzi-Heckler, 1984/1993, p. 8). With the ELM, the learner learns how to engage with the material in an embodied way and thereby to take responsibility for the learning and for exploring his or her own transformative edge.

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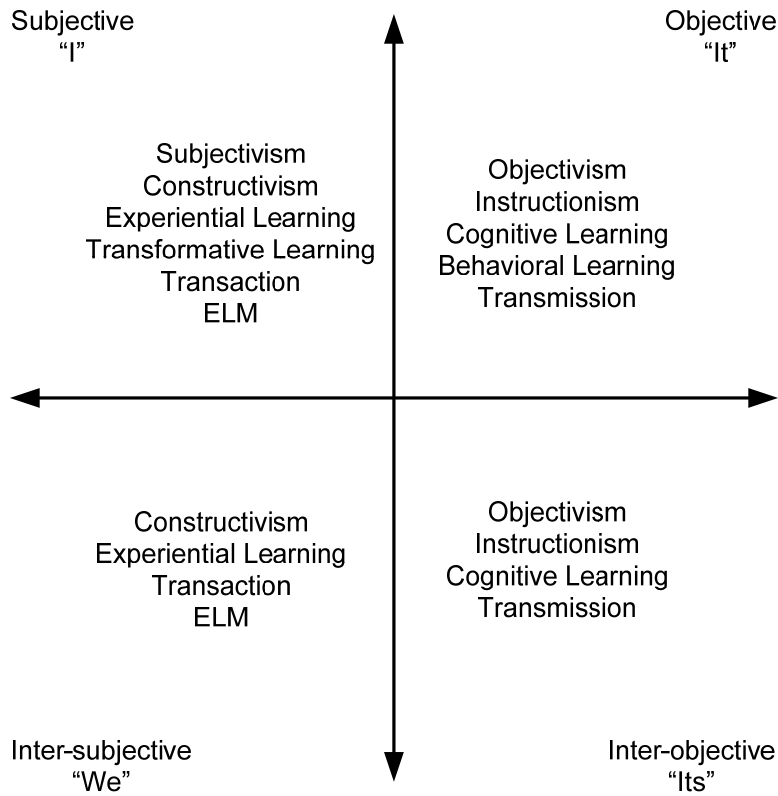
Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

AQAL	Abbreviation for “all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all states, all types.”
Behavioral learning theory	The theory that we learn primarily through the mechanisms of stimulus and response; external reinforcement induces us to learn, and its removal extinguishes learning.
Bricolage	A construction from whatever materials happen to be found at hand and are convenient.
Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence	Part of multiple intelligences (MI) theory, this type of intelligence is defined as “the ability to use one’s body in highly differentiated and skilled ways, for expressive as well as goal-directed purposes ... [and] to work skillfully with objects” (Gardner, 1983, p. 206).
Cognicentrism	The assumption that the mental way of knowing is superior to any other way of knowing.
Cognitive learning theory	The theory that we learn through our cognitive function by taking in new information, relating it to past learning, and storing it in an organized memory for future retrieval
Constructivism	The view that instructional practices should be generally “student-centered, student-controlled, process-driven, loosely structured, and highly interactive” (Johnson, 2005, p. 8).
Developmental learning theory	The theory that we learn in developmental stages through a complex process of adaptation, in which we assimilate familiar information easily but have to reorganize our mind to accommodate new information.
Embodied Learning Method (ELM)	A somatic methodology for educational settings in which the overarching goals are to promote creativity and personal growth in the learner.
Embodiment	“[T]he moment to moment process by which human beings allow awareness to enhance the flow of thoughts, feelings, sensations, and energies through our bodily selves” (Aposhyan, 2004, p. 52).
Epistemology	The study of how we know.
Experiential learning theory	The theory that we learn best through direct experience, and that “knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 38).

Flow	A state of being fully engaged with our experience in the present moment that “provide[s] a sense of discovery, a creative feeling of transporting the person into a new reality” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 74).
Holistic health education	Health education focused on promoting our ability to living our lives with meaning and connection rather than merely the absence of disease and illness.
Homiletic	Resembling a homily; preachy.
Objectivism	The idea that there is an explicit, objective reality that is knowable and measurable.
Pedagogy	The art and science of teaching.
Praxis	Practical application; practice.
Prehension	Grasping; taking hold; seizing; understanding.
Soma	The first-person, subjective experience of one’s body, in contrast to the word “body” which has a third-person, objective connotation.
Somatic	Relating to the soma.
Somatic awareness	A sense-based awareness that may occur on any or all of the multiple dimensions of human experience, whether physical, mental, or energetic.
Somatic education modalities	Modalities in which a practitioner teaches an individual greater body awareness and greater control over his or her sensory-motor process in order to correct irregularities or disturbances in the body’s functioning
Somatic healing modalities	Modalities in which a practitioner manipulates or acts upon an individual’s body at least in part to increase somatic awareness.
Somatic methodology	A methodology in which emphasis is given to the subjective experience of the sensations associated with one’s embodiment as well as the emotions, thoughts, and meanings that arise from this subjective experience.
Somatic psychology	Body-centered psychotherapies that focus significantly on somatic experience as an impetus for transformation and healing.
Subjectivism	The idea that we each construct our own meanings out of our own perceptions and experiences.

Taxonomy	A system for categorizing. In the field of education, a system for categorizing learning objectives.
Transformative learning theory	A branch of adult learning theory that views transformative learning as a process for reshaping our assumptions, beliefs, mindsets, expectations, and perspectives, collectively termed frames of reference.

Appendix B: Wilber's Four Quadrants Applied to Learning Theories and Educational Methodologies Discussed in this Paper.



Appendix C: Enlarged Diagram of Embodied Learning Taxonomy

