Embodied, Spiritual, Narrative, and Non-Western Learning

EDAE 624
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Embodied Learning

**Embodied** – possessing or existing in bodily form.

**Somatic** - Of, relating to, or affecting the body, especially as distinguished from a body part, the mind, or the environment; corporeal or physical.

From these definitions we can see that Embodied/ Somatic learning is that which happens in concrete, physical form.

Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) talk of rejection of the body as being related to, “Western privileging of mind over body. The focus of learning and education is a change in a mental state, from one of ignorance, to one of knowledge” (p. 190). Rejection of the body is further discussed as having root in the degradation of the body, and separation being used as a coping mechanism. “To deal with this dilemma, we engage in cognitive distancing” (p. 191).

Embodied Learning

Amann (2003) provides a four part model of somatic knowing

1. Kinesthetic – Kinesiology is the study of human movement and is the foundational study of physical education. The focus is on the physical body itself.

2. Sensory – is inherently somatic, because by definition it is how we access information through our senses, which is then related to our experience and extrapolated for significance.


4. Spiritual – The relation here is in meaning-making through music, art, imagery, symbols, and rituals. Overlaps the other three parts (as cited in Merriam, Cafferella, & Baumgartner, 2007).
Embodied Learning

Examples:

Matthews (1998) tells of a fifth grade teacher who used embodied learning by having students wear lab coats when they were to become scientists (as cited in Merriam et al., 2007, p. 193). This example can show congruence of mind and body in learning.

Stress reactions of the body. Stress may have an impact on the body in any number of ways. These ways of knowing the stress may be indicated prior to cognitive recognition of the situation. In a fight or flight response, the body reacts without waiting for cognitive acknowledgement of the stressor.
Embodied Learning

Examples continued:

Kinesthetic learning – performing a physical task, working through the mechanics, muscle memory etc. Your body can complete tasks without requiring deliberate thought. This is experienced when you maneuver through your house with the lights out, or drive home without consciously navigating.
Embodied Learning

Examples continued:

The body may provide knowledge when it is not in harmony with our cognitive selves. Heshusius and Ballard (1996) explain a situation they experienced:

“When we started to consciously reflect on how we had changed our most basic beliefs, we had to acknowledge that we knew, before we could account for it intellectually, that we no longer believed in what we were doing or in what we were being taught. That is, while the dominant assumptions still made sense rationally in terms of how things are done, they no longer made sense somatically and affectively. Something felt wrong. Our bodies told us so” (p. 2).
Embodied Learning

Examples continued:

Participants in a study on using embodied knowing in social work provide some examples (Sodhi & Cohen, 2012).

My stomach sunk immediately, I just knew that she was pregnant. I don’t know how I knew that. My stomach just dropped to the floor (p. 127).

I am physically more tired at the end of the session; and remain tenser for longer; my body takes longer to relax (p. 128). In reflection of heavily emotional encounters with clients.

A number of respondents in the study indicated that breathing changes were a common somatic response.
# Embodied Learning

### Embodied and Spiritual

The ritual and performance side of spiritual experience has an element of embodied learning.

The body will learn from the experience, and the affective domain will be encountered as well.

Beckett and Morris (2001) explain how a Muslim woman in an ESL course explains why she chose to cover herself up more (Somatic response) as the class went on. She said, “I’m closer now to my religion. I’m more … I’m a better person now because I do this” (as cited in Merriam et al., 2007, p. 197).

### Embodied and Narrative

Narrative learning can be complimented by embodied learning when the learner reflects on the somatic experience being narrated. While the journey may be looked at cognitively in process, a somatic reflection will bring new insight into the previously experienced.

Donald Miller (2009) reflects on living out a meaningful life by living out the hero’s journey. His approach is embodied in nature as it is about experiencing a meaningful life, but the driving force is living a life that would be interesting enough to be read as a book, or seen as a movie (Narrative). Miller addresses the spiritual element as he works through his own spiritual issues, looking to live a life with a higher calling than the expectations of others.
Embodied Learning

Non-Western Embodied Learning

A study by Leung and Liu (2011) looked at the quality of life (embodied) of Chinese adults and the relationship to lifelong education. They found that those active in lifelong education (typically informal in nature) reported a higher quality of life as described through lower levels of embodied complaints. A banking system was indicated in this work, as even informal education was found to generate psychosomatic burdens with increased quality of life to be gained later.

Learning through participation with others.
(i.e.) Group games/physical exercises or participating in group ritual (Spiritual and Embodied)

Holistic approach to embodied learning (Cognitive, affective, embodied connected for meaning-making)
Embodied Learning

Non-Western Embodied Learning

Sodhi and Cohen (2012) studied embodied knowing as it relates to social work. One respondent commented,

Well it’s not a mind-body; it’s us. There is no separation between the mind and body. They are one, and to exclude the huge part is like saying I like you, and cutting off your head and taking your head. What’s the head without the body? They are not disconnected. It’s no the mind-body; it’s us. (p. 127)

Another common theme in Non-Western Learning is learning through participation with others. This can be described as collective learning (Merriam et al., 2007). An example of this might be group games/physical exercises or participating in group ritual (Spiritual and Embodied)
Spiritual

Spirituality is about making meaning of one’s life or about feeling. Spirituality is bigger than one’s self. It is about a belief in what you are doing and may commonly be seen as traditional or religious, linked to a culture, society or group.

In writing, Cultivating the Spirit, (http://www.spirituality.ucla.edu/book/) UCLA Professors Alexander W. Astin and Helen S. Astin believe that many college students arrive at college without being able to make meaning of their lives and roles in college. Both professors believe spirituality in education can help students develop more meaning of their education and lives. They also believe that spirituality in college can help students (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jm1c3l_8zo8) understand their emotions and where they fit into society.

Many students arrive at college with religious beliefs but are still searching in their lives. Other non-religious students arrive at college and are searching for the meaning of their life. Spirituality in college can help all students make meaning of their lives and enhance their educational experience.
Spirituality in Adult Learning

“To the extent that spirituality is about meaning-making, it can be argued that it has a place in adult learning” (Merriam, Caffarella, Baumgartner, 2007, p. 204).

Spiritually can also have a connection in the way educators practice their profession. This same connection can also influence learning based upon the spiritual background of students. The role of the educator is to seek out these influences and work to make their own diverse background and the student’s compliment one another to facilitate more effective learning. (Merriam, Caffarella, Baumgartner, 2007)

“Daloz’s (1999) concept of the mentor as a guide to the holistic development of the mentee speaks of the process as a journey. Mentoring is an activity that can promote spiritual development,” (Merriam, Caffarella, Baumgartner, 2007, p. 205).

“Spirituality is, by its very nature, difficult to capture in the rational prose of academia… what we do not yet have is an understanding of or theoretical models of spiritual learning,” (Merriam, Caffarella, Baumgartner, 2007, p. 207).
Major World Religions

All major world religions developed in Asia. Western society view of religion is generally Monotheistic or the belief in one God. Eastern society generally views religions as a set of guiding principles and traditions and thus can weave several (polytheistic) into their system of beliefs. (Murphey, 2006)

- Hinduism is philosophical beliefs as a way of life based upon kharma and darma
  Hindu spiritual pathways: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zsbZVtlT-Y
- Buddhism is “awakened one” or enlightened (Murphey, 2006, p. 27)
- Jainism is primarily an Indian religion and off-shoot of Buddhism
- Confucianism is “a moral philosophy to set a good example…the key element is the right relationship” (Murphey, 2006, p.29)
- Daoism is harmony or balance as contrasted in nature-yin yang
- Judaism-Jewish religion
- Shinto-divinity seen in nature
- Islam-no definition listed due to varied Western concepts and opinions
- Judeo-Christian-no definition listed due to varied Western concepts and opinions
Western and Non-Western Cultures

• Western:
  – Documented knowledge
  – Individualistic
    • Andragogy – self-directed learning
    • Written
    • School curriculum
  – Value freedom and independence
  – Success is materialistic
  – Communication is direct
  – Knowledge
    • Self-contained
    • Self-sustained
    • Righteousness
  – Academic knowledge
    • Procedures and rules
    • Cognitive learning

• Non-Western
  – Oral presentations
  – Collectivistic
    • Communal learning
    • Passed on from generation to generation orally
    • Not in school curriculum
  – Success is relationships or friendships
  – Communication is subtle, indirect, often employs 3rd party
  – Knowledge
    • Conveyed by story telling, metaphors, myths, art, music, dance, song, folklore
  – Developed in daily living

Colorado State University
Non-Western Society

In some non-Western societies education’s sole purpose is for a life of service.

Some nations outside the West do not permit girls or women to attend school in any fashion. Some of these are based upon traditional roles of women while others are strictly religious in nature. Others may permit women to attend college but do not allow women to teach formally in any form or fashion. In several parts of the world women have been beaten or killed for attending school or teaching.

In Japan, the Japanese have one of the most competitive systems in the world for college. The college name will determine one’s place in life and where they work.

In China, entire villages will pay for one student to attend college in hopes that the student will serve the village with a skill the village is in need of.

In Korea, independence is viewed as a sign of “immaturity or self-centeredness”. (Merriam Caffarella, Baumgartner, 2006, p. 218)

Non-Western spirituality can be a combination of tradition and religion. Many of the students attending college will keep in mind that their education is for the benefit of their family and community. Failure to complete school can lead to shame or a loss of face. Many non-Western students understand the value and purpose their education serves.
Eastern Society

Eastern Society generally views the West as individualistic and materialistic.

This type of behavior by the West is seen in the East as, “antisocial, disruptive, selfish, and destructive of group interest,” (Murphey, 2006, p. 43).

Eastern Society views everything as contributing to the greater good of the whole or group. This includes families, villages, and society as a whole.

The East operates on what is called group oriented thinking or group think. Individualism is discouraged. A Chinese proverb says. “when there is water in the big river, the little streams will be full also,” (Murphey, 2006, p. 43).

Authority rests solely in the heads of families or elders viewed as a small kingdom or Hierarchy or the caste system such as in India.

Japan has what is called a family registry. If one’s name is removed from the registry for disobedience or other poor behavior (lose face), these people cease to exist to the family and society. Family members removed by the head of the family cannot own property or be employed and more until added back to the family registry.
Eastern Society

Filial piety is still widely practiced in many Asian nations. This is complete obedience and respect for parents and elder family members. Many generations live within one house-hold and are expected to care for their elders in old age. Other customs are to arrange marriages for the sole benefit of the family unit on the male side and to carry on the family name by producing a son.

Wives who fail to produce a male heir can be sent back to her family as a sign of shame. Shame is another control mechanism within many Asian cultures. Just as the Japanese remove names from the family registry, shame is used to outcast many in Asia. Once, outcast or shamed, the individual will have to reconcile differences from the entire group to be permitted back in and generally pays a hefty personal cost. Many of these rules are enforced not only by tradition but by the legal system as well.

Education in Asia is seen as one means of advancement in society. However, education is not for individual gain. Many Asian nations expect that educated families members serve the entire family which could mean financially supporting parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins as well as honorably serving society.
Narrative Learning

Narrative is:

- a constructivist format.
- can be fiction or non-fiction. (wiki, 2012)
- a means of passing along history.
- used to make meaning of our experiences. (Fisher, 1987)
- Embedded in our lives
  - Familial
    - Values, beliefs, customs, roles, rituals
  - Cultural
    - Western vs. non-Western
      - U.S. is all-powerful
      - Individual is responsible for his own success
  - Individual
    - How we story our lives
  - Organizational
    - What the organization represents (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007)
Narrative Learning

Examples:

Diary
News
Movies
Video games
Dance
Journals
Speeches
Sermons
Protest rally's
Songs
Poetry
Cancer survivor stories
Holocaust survivor stories

Narrative Learning

Art Narrative

The Problem We All Live With by Norman Rockwell (1894-1978)

Life Narrative

Autobiography of a Slave
Coat of Many Colors by Dolly Parton
Back through the years I go wonderin' once again
Back to the seasons of my youth
I recall a box of rags that someone gave us
And how my momma put the rags to use
There were rags of many colors and every piece was small
And I didn't have a coat and it was way down in the fog
Momma sewed the rags together sewin' every piece with love
She made my coat of many colors that I was so proud of
As she sewed, she told a story from the Bible, she had read
About a coat of many colors Joseph wore and then she said
"Perhaps this coat will bring you good luck and happiness"
And I just couldn't wait to wear it and momma blessed it with a kiss
My coat of many colors that my momma made for me
Made only from rags but I wore it so proudly
Although we had no money oh I was rich as I could be
In my coat of many colors my momma made for me

(http://www.elyrics.net)

Dances of Native American culture
The “Traditional Dance” is a story of bravery or a story of the hunt. Traditionally the men would come home and act out their accomplishments to the villagers. This form of storytelling has been handed down for centuries.

Usually the dance is taught to the children at a young age. The child will dance throughout their life and into adulthood. It is then prayed for that this adult will then teach the dance to their children. This will prevent the American Indian culture and tradition from becoming extinct.

Prayers are said for those that will perform any of the dances. Prayers are also said for those ancestors who have passed on in thanks for all the wisdom they passed on and for the traditions that are still carried out today.

(http://www.essortment.com)
Narrative Learning

Embodied Narrative

The hula kahiko is a traditional hula dance from Hawaii. The hula dancer must become one with the dance and the actions, objects, or images they are imitating in their hula dance. The dance is very meaningful and every movement of the body represents something. The hands are important as well. The dancer may imitate a palm tree, war, plants, and even animals. They are transforming themselves mentally into the object they are portraying through dance. Because the individual is dancing it is important to watch even though chants also accompany the dance. There are hula schools and groups that teach old style hula dancing to people to spread the culture.

(Spiritual Narrative)

Joseph and His Coat of Many Colors

A very long time ago in a place called Canaan there lived a man named Jacob. Jacob married Rachel. Jacob had twelve sons. Jacob loved all his sons but his favorite son was his eleventh son, Joseph. Joseph had dreams that he would tell his father. His dreams made his brothers mad at him. He would dream that the stars in the sky would bow down before him. His father gave him a gift. A rainbow colored coat made from the finest fabric. The fabric was beautiful and soft. Not at all like the rough fabric that his brothers wore. The gift by their father to Joseph made the brothers jealous...

(http://www.wailuabay.com)

(http://www.ainglkiss.com)
Narrative Learning

Non-Western Embodied and Spiritual Narrative

Dances of Native American Culture

The Native American dance is a way of having fun and is spiritual. It can be a form of prayer, expressing joy or grief, a method of becoming closer with man and nature.

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Native American dance is not only to have fun but spiritual in itself. It can be a form of prayer, a way of expressing joy or grief, and a method of becoming closer with man and nature.

Yvonne’s narrative learning experiences

Thursday: Spanish class. Performed role plays in front of class (embodied narrative).

Friday: Watched Unmistaken Child about the reincarnation of a Buddhist Lama (non-Western).

Saturday: I emailed a couple and asked them about their teaching experiences in Taiwan.

Sunday: I met with a Taiwanese woman to learn about Taiwan and its culture. I was given a Taiwanese magazine (narrative). Some of the articles reiterated some of the information the woman shared with me.

I went to church and listened to the pastor preach from the Bible (spiritual). I shared the information with my friend at work (restorying).

Monday: Called to jury duty. I learned about the court system (Western ‘American’ culture).

Tuesday: Attended a yoga class (embodied/non-Western). The teacher helped me to learn some of the positions.
Narrative Learning, Adult Development, and Transformational Learning

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Summary

- Embodied Learning
  - possessing or existing in bodily form
- Spiritual Learning
  - making meaning of one’s life
- Narrative Learning
  - story telling, dance, song, etc.
- Non-Western Perspective
  - family, group, and community oriented
References:


Dance. (n.d.). [Digital Photo]. Retrieved from http://www.google.com/search?rlz=1T4ACGW_enUS395US397&q=dance&um=1&ie=UTF-8&hl=en&tbm=isch&source=og&sa=N&tab=wi&ei=fb15T8KKCY2k8gSgdCFCg&biw=1141&bih=838&sei=gL15T7LTCYmQ8wSR1c2FCg


