

PLAY, HUMOR and PLEASURE: THE WAY A BODY LEARNS

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When do we stop learning? Hopefully never! Introduce into your life new information, new ideas, new movement, new people, new ways of being and you will continue to feel full of vitality and curiosity. Nearly all levels of our being, physical, intellectual, emotional, psychological, neurological, are nourished by encounters with what is innovative and fresh.

So, if learning keeps us so young, vital and alive, why do so many resent the learning process? Our western paradigm for education has been one that generally does not stimulate creativity nor encourage us to be innovative. The institutional education model that most of us have grown up with is one that follows the industrial concept of “accountability” and “control”. Fun and creativity take a back seat (or get no seat at all!) to productivity. In this model, motivation suffers and stress increases. It is not a system that encourages growth and renewal. It is not sustainable and will not create a long lasting healthy environment.

Well, artists, rockers and rebels, REJOICE . . . because the path of Core Watsu and Tantsu Explorer goes beyond the institutional rules and gives us a new model for innovative, integrated learning. We play, we laugh, we make contact, we empathize and above all, we enjoy! In the process, we become enriched both individually and on a community level. This is how we truly learn. . . we absorb “information” and transform it, through experience, into personal wisdom.

We Play

*“Play is the exultation of the possible.”
Martin Buber*

Play is the most primary and fundamental activity that fosters learning and growth. Children intuitively learn through “playing”. It is their “job” to play all day, and an important job it is . . . because they are growing in every way at blazing speeds. Animals, in their own unique ways, play their whole lives through. We too can reclaim our right to play! Play is made up of the cycles of free choice, movement and discovery. Core Watsu and Tantsu Explorer is a forum for play and discovery. The phase of EXPLORE FLOW in the progression invites us to develop a presence-filled curiosity and we allow ourselves to be sensitively inquisitive and engaged deeply in the process unfolding before our very eyes and heart. With delight, we can participate in the co-creation of movement expressions of the Watsu or Tantsu sharing.

Engaged play supports healthy development of sense of self and self-esteem. Our sense of humor is born of play. We learn about ourselves, about our own humanity and about how to accept success and make mistakes as a part of an on-going process. When we are well established in our own personal presence, we can be of greater support to another as their process unfolds. This is a fundamental quality that is both learned and utilized in a Watsu or Tantsu sharing. The more present I am in my own being, the more we can both enjoy our shared being-ness in the practice. Play gives rise to coherence.

We Laugh

*“Humor is the affectionate communication of insight.”
Leo Rosten*

Humor is one of the most important factors in creating a positive emotional state-of-being. In turn, positive emotions create a fertile environment for cognitive and neurological development. Humor

is one of the most essential ingredients for integrated learning. A sympathetic glance at the soft side of humanity can bring a kind smile to our face, and a feeling in our cells, that “we are all in this together!” Well-intentioned humor can create a strong bond between us and develop trust. When we are having fun, we generally do not feel under threat. Our nervous system lets down its vigilant guard and a new level of trust and group interaction and synergy arises. Fun leads to trust, and trust tells our systems that it is safe to assimilate new ideas and information.

Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive and empathize with our own emotions and those of others. As we grew, if we were lucky to have humor and wisdom in our families, we may have learned ways of expressing and embodying the wide range of emotions felt by humans. Others may have learned ways of managing, repressing or using emotions to manipulate the world around us. The heart resonance generated in a Core Watsu or Tantsu sharing offers a possibility to shed new light on our emotions and reclaim our emotional bodies. When peppered with kind and loving humor, this process can become fun, light and penetrate deeper into our heart, than would a forceful catharsis.

Laughing has been scientifically proven to relieve stress and increases vital energy. It creates movement all throughout the body, frees the diaphragm, increases breath capacity and reduces conflict. If two people with opposing viewpoints can find a bridge through humor and laughter, maybe they are not so far away from resolution after all. Humor and laughter facilitates creativity, even in problem solving. When we are resolving conflict, we are opening to new ways, which again, means that our systems are learning something new.

The water in which we practice Watsu is a very resonate element. You may notice when you are in a sharing group, that some silly little human happening sets someone to laugh, and before you know it, the whole pool is in a belly laugh. The water enhances this effect (but it certainly happens on land too!) For years we have heard about the “heart-body-wave” of Watsu. . . maybe now it is time for the “belly-body-laugh-wave.” Try it as one of your Watsu experiments. Lightheartedly, find something to get the laughter going, something silly, something common and human . . . and see what happens! The whole pool, the whole room, your whole being will be filled with a bubbly presence of joy and exhilaration. This is a state that education consultant, Mary K. Morrison calls “*humergy*”. A peak moment when you are overflowing with the feeling of vitality, alertness, joy and energy through humor! *Humergy* is a radically healing state and VERY VERY FUN! I bet you are smiling just reading this right now!

We Empathize

Healthy imitation leads to possibility leads to authenticity.

The act of witnessing a new kind movement in another creates new neurological growth within our own systems. Simply watching another’s movement inspires a “kinesthetic empathy” of subtle motor and neural activity in the body. Often we don’t even know that a movement, or thought or concept is even possible until we witness it in another. The “Mirror Neuron Theory” suggests that in the act of observation, our bodies empathize with and learn about the movements and gestures we are exposed to.

So, especially in learning new movement, or un-learning repetitive movement patterns, somatic imitation may be a great jump-start. As children we have all learned by imitation, and then as we have matured hopefully taken that inspiration on towards our own authentic expression. The objective is not to “copy” what we have seen but simply have exposure to new possibilities and let our bio-systems take it from there. To try to copy will shut down your creative flow, and inhibit an intelligent organic learning process. Instead a somatic imitation happens simply and automatically, trust that it is happening, sense what the movement might feel like and then just let go. The Core

Watsu and Tantsu triad experience offer a great opportunity for learning through this “kinesthetic empathy” as we will sometimes be in the role of the *participatory witness*. While it may seem that our main “function” is to hold the space for who is receiving, we at the same time receive millions of information impulses every second as we perceive the movement experience our partners. It is learning through empathy and without effort.

When we shift the role of the “giver,” our objective is not to imitate what we have witnessed, but the empathetic effects remain imprinted in our tissues and we may find that we can flow through new movements with more ease and grace simply from observing. Out of this new “neural dexterity” can grow new potentials for creative response and authenticity that may not have been possible before. Coupled with other integrative learning tools of play, humor and pleasure, somatic imitation can be very useful in the moment.

We Enjoy

In all of our Watsu and Tantsu sharings, we encourage an atmosphere of ease, enjoyment and pleasure. Play, humor and empathy evoke ease. Ease is the opposite of stress and sets the tone for the body’s innate regenerative processes to engage naturally. In a pleasure state (when the nervous system is in a state of parasympathetic response), we slow down, cells renew, breathing becomes more ample and relaxed, we notice and enjoy more, and all life processes become more efficient. Pleasure is inherent in the cellular and systemic regenerative processes.

Change, even from a redundant or unhealthy environment to a more positive one can be a stressor to the bio-system if not made with the intention of creating a pleasurable experience. A pleasurable environment gently dissolves negative biological response without aggression. Pleasure paves the way for the nervous system and all of the body’s tissues and fluids to be re-informed with new possibilities and a creates a positive biological response in the process of the change. Who is in our Watsu or Tantsu cradle understands that we are here as a friendly support, we are not a threat. In this non-threatening, pleasurable environment, our partner has the opportunity for his/her habitual defensive reactions to transform into positive intention for change. Pleasure is the original alchemist, it transforms!

It is important to understand that pleasure is not “excitement” as is commonly inferred. A stimulating experience can be “sensually pleasurable” and positively invigorating. Exciting events can activate the sympathetic nervous system in a positive way and energizing way. This can be a playful and essential jump-start for igniting more vital life force energy in our systems. However, for the regenerative processes and parasympathetic nervous system mode of repose to be engaged, pleasure is experienced like a wide, vast, expansive sensation of wellbeing, relaxed and being in the flow of life.

As we understand and apply the psycho-somatic importance of pleasure in our sharings, not only does our Watsu or Tantsu companion receive increased benefit, but our energy and creativity also becomes more ample.

We Embody

*A wise man has no extensive knowledge; He who has extensive knowledge is not a wise man.
Lao-Tzu “Tao te Ching”*

When we can truly embody our experiences of play, pleasure, humor, contact, breathing and witnessing, our learning becomes integrated. The combination of all that we have “learned” and our own unique life experience is expressed through us as individuals, not just walking encyclopedias of accumulated knowledge. Learning becomes embodied understanding when it

originates from an attitude of playfulness and joy, not obligation or repetitive studying. Learning, practicing, sharing, assimilation, integration of knowledge becomes personal understanding.

Nothing is more boring than someone who simply recites facts. Instead, the fascinating human is the one who simply and honestly lives what they have experienced, and without pretense, remains open to each new adventure. Without play, we become old. Without humor, we become grumpy. Without empathy, we become stuck and rigid. Without pleasure, we become brittle and dry. Jump into the school of life and its ongoing course of “play-sure” (play + pleasure) where you will be most authentically informed and enriched. Dare to dance the juicy dance of life! You might think you look silly . . . but then again, you might make someone smile and that is the start of a wonderful education!

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