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Classroom as Dojo: Contemplative Teaching and Learning as Martial Art

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This paper identifies assumptions about education behind the mainstream North American schooling: that the primary educational goal is to teach subject matter and deliver knowledge and skills, most often divorced from the immediacy of students' lifeworld, in the service of consumerism driven industrial civilization. Moreover, student behavior defined as unproductive and disruptive in terms of reaching such instrumentalist goal is seen as in need of control and management, which then becomes central concern and operation of schooling. This paper challenges these assumptions and offers a larger educational vision and practice in alignment with world wisdom traditions, namely becoming more fully human. We describe becoming human in terms of becoming increasingly whole, integrated, attuned, and in alignment in the three-fold relationality of self-other-nature. We then propose contemplative education as a way to cultivate becoming human, and offer an example of martial art practice and an alternative paradigm of classroom-as-dojo as a guiding metaphor. Contemplative learning in the dojo aims at embodied, intersubjective, and self-authoring practices.

The Warm-Up Preamble

Everything human happens in the classroom: joy, suffering, boredom, resentment, fear, anxiety, jealousy, envy, greed, love, anger, and hatred. All of these and many more flood our consciousness, teacher and student alike, moment by moment. All these very human experiences are acted out subtly and not so subtly, spoken of or hidden, guarded or left open. We note that what does not happen sufficiently in most typical North American classrooms is learning centrally about what really goes on in the mind-body-heart-soul-spirit (henceforth referred to as "mind-body" or "body-mind") of students and teachers, and working with this inner world content in the body as the ultimate container and vehicle for expression of human consciousness. We propose that working with such embodied and enacted materials in the classroom is central to an educational project of cultivating humanity. This project has deep roots in many world wisdom traditions. Today, as we struggle with the destructive impact of human beings on each other and on other beings, we need, more than ever, wisdom.

The modern North American cultural understanding seems to be that school is not the place where the abovementioned learning and transformation can and should take place. Rather, school is primarily where quantifiable knowledge and testable skills are taught and acquired. Teachers teach subjects, and students learn subject content. In this understanding and operation, the distracting and disturbing factor, apparently, is that students, despite coercive and systemic discouragement from all levels of culture, come with their subjectivity, and experience suffering, boredom, resentment, fear, and anger, as well as elation, excitement, and hilarity. Emotions, especially those deemed "negative," are most often seen as distracting our students from learning the required curriculum material. Indeed, they are often seen as disturbing influences, taking students' minds away from course content and also at times as precursors to behavior that is disturbing to others and to the "smooth" running of the classroom.

In mainstream North American teacher education programs, student teachers are taught mostly to *manage* the classroom. Two fundamental assumptions about education seem to be built into this idea of managing the classroom: (a) that to teach subject matter is the primary educational goal, and (b) that students behavior that is defined as *unproductive and disruptive* from the viewpoint of the above goal must be controlled. Through the centuries to the present moment, various methods of control have been proffered and tried. The best-known and most widely implemented are variations on discipline-and-punishment, with or without the addition of rewards. Our intent in this paper is to challenge these fundamental assumptions themselves and to offer a different educational vision and practice.

We distinguish *education* from *instruction*. *Education* is for growing, raising, maturing, cultivating, and fulfilling human beings, manifesting the full potential of humanity. We again note here that these substantive educational ideals of humanity have been addressed, for instance, in many of the world's wisdom traditions.[1] Notwithstanding the differences in their worldviews, these traditions share an understanding that education has to do with *human becoming*: becoming human beings. *Instruction* has a narrower meaning: teaching people to have certain knowledge and skills that are deemed to equip them to function and survive in a given society. Of course, it is a given that the process of educating will involve instruction in particular knowledge and skills. However, it is important not to conflate education with instruction, lest we lose sight of the larger aim of education that the wisdom traditions hold up before us: humans increasingly maturing into and embodying a fuller humanity that can manifest wisdom and virtue.

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[1] "Wisdom traditions" refers to traditions of teachings that emanated from the Axial Age thinkers, such as Parsva and Mahavira (Janism), Siddhartha Gautama (Buddhism), Jesus of Nazareth (Christianity), Lao-Tze (Daoism), Confucius (Confucianism), Socrates, and the like. Refer to works by Karl Jaspers (1962, 2003) and Karen Armstrong (2006), among others, for discussions of the Axial Age. See also a contemporary interpretation by Heesoon Bai (2014).

Currently we are witnessing an experience of education that is dominated by instruction. Teaching and learning have become focused on the acquisition of subject matter, content knowledge, and skills that are aimed at equipping students for securing jobs and therefore, presumably, material and financial security in their lives. Again, we point out that material and financial security, while necessary, is not the same as, and cannot support the development of, existential security and ecological well-being—the sense of being whole and full, or fulfilled, in alignment with the world and cosmos, and in attunement with the three-fold relationality of self-other-nature (Bai, Cohen, & Scott, f2013). The result of narrowly identifying education with instruction not only blinds us to the larger aims of education but also, from the viewpoint of student experience, may render the knowledge and skills they acquire meaningless, particularly in the present sociocultural context that increasingly presents a future of uncertainty and provokes a sense of insecurity. Boredom, resentment, anger, alienation, meaninglessness, and angst afflict many students. The increasing pressure of competition in terms of knowledge acquisition leads to increased suffering and decreased inner peace and contentment. What is often seen in classrooms as disturbing behavior is "acting out," which is the "outcome" of life experience that is lacking in meaning and vital engagement. Unfortunately, there seems to be little keen appetite amongst educators to see disturbing behavior by students as a message from the margins that is important for mainstream culture and for education practice itself: a message that there is a problem!

In the name of survival and success, children all over the world are compelled, under the threats of punishment and the withdrawal of love, esteem, and support, to compete in acquiring impersonal and irrelevant knowledge and skills. In collectivist countries such as Korea, Japan, and China, where the pressure to compete is inordinate, the student suicide rate is high (Jung, 2015; Yip, 2008), while in individualist countries such as the United States and Canada, alienated and angry young people commit mass killings on school grounds ("School Shooting," n.d.) and become increasingly involved with substances and activities that help numb their feeling dimension and their experiences of psychological breakdown. All these are, in our judgment, the *psycho-logical* consequences of an instrumentalist education that has prioritized acquiring impersonal and meaningless knowledge and skills over developing as whole human beings. Ours is a culture that dehumanizes, turning human *beings* into human *doings*. John Taylor Gatto (1999), an author and former New York State and New York City Teacher of the Year, observes:

> There must be some reason we are called human *beings* and not human *doings*. And I think this reason is to commemorate the way we can make the best of our limited time by alternating effort with reflection, and reflection completely free of the get-something motive. Whenever I see a kid daydreaming in school, I'm careful never to shock the reverie out of existence. (p. 170)

Educational environments are a microcosm of contemporary culture: what goes on in a culture goes on in its educational environments. Thus, by transforming the heart of "human doings" education, and rediscovering and recovering the meaning of education as the development of whole human beings with courage, compassion, and wisdom, we can significantly affect the ethos and orientation of our culture, which is currently saturated with instrumentalist values and alienated psyches. Key to this work is moving beyond the primacy of content absorption and task completion. Is there a paradigm of education currently available and being tried out that we see as promising in holding this key? Yes. We see contemplative education as reorienting what we think education can and must embody: a shift from the primacy of instruction to the primacy of education of human beings toward their wholeness as ethical citizens who feel that contribution to the community and the planet is primary. Contemplative approaches to education facilitate reaching toward this objective through addressing the *being,* in contrast to the *having,* dimension of humans (Fromm, 1976). A contemplative curriculum cultivates the depth and breadth of being human through a self-cultivation process that facilitates the possibility of human beings becoming increasingly whole, integrated, attuned, and in alignment (Bai, Donald, & Scott, 2009; Bai & Scott, 2011; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010). The primary focus of contemplative inquiry and learning is on *who we are*, not *what we have* or *what we do*. This is not to say that we will neglect the dimensions of having and doing: these dimensions, especially the doing dimension, will unfold naturally as we increasingly remove inner obstacles to the unfolding expression of our core humanity, and we will seamlessly integrate having and doing with being.

With the practice of contemplative education, the following kinds of personal inquiries become central in educational environments: *how do I become increasingly whole? How do I enhance the integrity of mind-body-heart-soul-spirit? How do I continue to develop my connection with life and the universe through my breathing, seeing, sensing, feeling, thinking, self-reflecting, moving, and relating? How do I develop myself to enable my ability to be in and with the world in all of its conflict and complexity? How can I take that which confounds me as a teaching from which I can grow and learn? How can I face the world and welcome in all of life? How do develop my sense of a spiritual base within? How can I become increasingly compassionate in the face of adversity that threatens my sense of self? How do I grow love and good will in the face of competition and pressure to outdo others?* Contemplative learning is about working with these and related questions, taking us into those practices that move us more and more in the directions of "yes" and "this is how" in response to them.

In this chapter, we introduce the concept of classroom-as-*dojo* (the Japanese word for "place of the Way") as a guiding metaphor for how we can work with the above inquiries. Embedded in this metaphor is a holistic and contemplative paradigm of practice. We offer an illustration of the classroom-as-dojo within which contemplative learning is taken up as embodied (through attending to and working with the body), intersubjective (through engaging and working with each other's subjectivity and the relational field), and self-authoring (through working with and transforming one's interiority) practices.

Stepping Into the Dojo

Dojo (道場) is a Japanese term for a place where a martial art is typically practiced. Dojo literally means "place of the Way." Initially dojos were adjunct to Buddhist temples where people meditated. H. E. Davey (2007), a contemporary martial arts teacher and Japanese culture scholar, explains: "the term [dojo] has meditative connotations and describes the training hall used in some Japanese cultural arts" (p. 35). In classical Japanese arts of all kinds (as with classical Chinese and Korean arts), the purpose of artistic practice is twofold: (1) to use the practice to facilitate learning how to be in the *do* (*dao* in Chinese); and (2) to be in the process of perfecting one's self in order to be increasingly in the flow of the universal energy in all of life's activities.

The dojo, then, is the place where, supported by a community of fellow practitioners, a person increasingly strives for and cultivates integration of mind, body, heart, soul, and spirit. For us what matters centrally in the classroom-as-dojo is not so much what is taught (subject matter) as whether we as learners and teachers are growing as human beings through whatever subject matter it is that we are learning and teaching. Morihei Ueshiba, the founder of *Aikido*, a form of martial art originated in Japan, stated: "True victory is not defeating an enemy. True victory gives love and changes the enemy's heart" (as quoted in Leonard, 2000, p.150). Here the attacker or "enemy" is any adversarial force, including and especially the internalized forces of a person's social, cultural, and familial conditioning that limits and blocks the person from growing and embodying greater potentials of humanity. This quote also suggests that making a true connection with the other is central to meeting challenges and overcoming difficulties. Such a connection is akin to an I-Thou encounter (Buber, 1970), where the sanctity of each person is honored regardless of the conditioning that obscures his or her humanity. When the martial artist is able to see the suffering heart of the opponent, he or she can respond in ways that help the other not to cause harm to themselves or others.

Educators as Martial Artists[2]

There is nothing like a story to concretely embody abstract ideas. We wish to start off this section with a story that will give a sense of what we mean by "educators as martial artists." In the course of this paper we will share more stories, both our own and others'.

There is a story from an unknown storyteller retold by Amy Mindell (1995) about an American martial arts master who was riding in a subway in Japan:

> An aikido master from the United States went to Japan to refresh his skills. He got onto one of the subways in Japan and suddenly a big brute came hobbling down the aisle, drunk and threatening to everyone. The aikido master was thrilled that he could finally put his skills into action, since he had never had the opportunity outside of his traditional practice.
>
> As the brute and the aikido master were about to fight, a small, elderly man sitting on the bench looked up and asked the drunken man if he would come over and talk. The drunk threatened the old man, but was nevertheless intrigued. The elderly man asked him what it was that he had been drinking. The drunk replied, "Sake!" The old man smiled with delight, saying that he, too, loved to drink sake outdoors with his wife in the evening. The old man asked the drunk if he had a wife, and the drunken man said that he was alone and very sad. When the aikido master from the U.S. was about to leave the subway, he turned around and saw the drunken man lying with his head on the old man's lap, talking quietly as the old man stroked his head. (p. 104)

What is evident in this story and relevant for educators is the elderly man's ability to sense the other and join him in his world. This ability can be trained through certain martial arts, such as Aikido, that have the inner development of the practitioner as their primary focus. The man who is drunk is living in an alternate reality, one that shields him, through alcohol, from the pain of his own dislocation and isolation (Alexander, 2008). The elderly man has a keen sense of what it will take to connect with this person even in the latter's alcohol-altered state. He does not shy away from the reality before him and is able to meet it. This is precisely the core attitude and ability that martial arts cultivate. The elderly man in the story protects the inebriated man and the others in the subway car while he helps the man connect with his heart. It is the elderly man in the story who is a true master of the Way.

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[2] Portions of the content in the following sections were originally written in Sean Park's doctoral dissertation, http://summit.sfu.ca/item/14288.

Note that in our commentary we have referred to the inebriated person in the story as a *man who is drunk* and not, as we commonly say, a *drunk*: a small but important point for us. To use the latter term would have reduced this man to an object—an "it"—and stripped him of his core humanity. The educator as martial artist and practitioner/exponent of the Way fights against such reduction and fights for overcoming all manner of alienation and disconnect. Morihei Ueshiba (1984) stated that the primary goal of the martial artist is to achieve mind-body unity (Aikido literally means "the Way of unifying with universal energy"): not to defeat the opponent, but to join with them so that the *hearts* of all involved may be transformed. The little story above illustrates this philosophy of martial arts well.

To transform the heart we need to see how the attacker and the lover are not "out there" but within (Palmer, 1994, p. 6). "Attackers" are those people and situations that we find annoying, threatening, loathsome, and troublesome. "Lovers" are those people and situations that we are attracted to, admire, and like. As such, we are surrounded by attackers and lovers every day, everywhere, including in our classrooms. And, most importantly, lovers and attackers are within us, as our likes, dislikes, aversions, hatred, fear, greed, compulsions, and delusions. Martial arts, when undertaken as Way (*dao*)-finding and harmony-making, as in Aikido, prepare us to meet, confront, and stay in contact with the lover and the attacker within. In a very direct way, the breathing and meditation practices that are integral to martial arts training teach the artist to regulate the nervous system in the face of chaos, conflict, fear, and loathing, and support him or her in remaining centered and grounded. This is the most valuable training that martial arts give us, as our tendency is to either run away from challenge and conflict; react to them with hostility; or, if neither is possible, get deflated and collapse. Peace is not gained by running away from conflict or reacting with hostility. It is gained by facing conflict and making moves that will change the hearts of all who are involved. We share the following fictionalized story, based on the teaching experience of one of us, to illustrate how a teacher as martial artist would handle a conflict-charged pedagogical situation:

> *A student in my class is very dominating when he speaks. His mind seems to flit from one thought to another with barely a pause for breath. His words are punctuated by giggles and laughter that do not seem to fit with the content of what he is saying. I notice as well that the other students in the class seem preoccupied when he is speaking, and that this begins for most students at any moment when he begins to speak. I notice my own impatience and, at times, my unexpressed fury. Several weeks into the course this student starts up yet again. I notice all my reactions that I have seen previously, including my fury. This time I focus on my inner experience and I begin to feel my own sense of helplessness. This time, I do not fight it, and do not suppress it. I allow myself to feel my feelings. I feel*

> *a bodily sense of weakness as if this situation is beyond me. I have quick memory flashes of other times in my life where I had such feelings. Aha! My old patterns of experience were being reactivated. With this recognition and acknowledgment, I begin to feel a sense of relaxation, inner peace, and compassion for this student, for the other students, and for myself. A few seconds later, I speak in a calm and composed voice while this student is in the middle of a sentence. "You need to stop talking. You are off topic. You are not leaving any space for others." Suddenly everyone is alert and very attentive. This student protests, "I have not finished." I push the issue gently but firmly, and with full compassion in my voice. "You need to be quiet now and let others speak." The student goes silent. There is a visible sigh of relief from others. The situation with this student will need more work. The initial "blow" for change for him, for the others, and for me as educator has been struck.*

Acknowledging, preparing for, and entering into internal and interpersonal conflict in the ways exemplified in the story are vital to transforming difficult situations. One cannot transform conflict if one does not notice, prepare for, or engage in the process. The martial arts explicitly put practitioners in the heat of conflict where the potential for injury and death are present. Although training conditions such as the use of protective equipment or rules of engagement are usually set to protect participants, awareness of our mortality and vulnerability "gives direction to our [martial art] training and provides the orientation that encourages us to advance toward a certain kind of perfection" (Tokitsu, 2012, p. 42). Contemporary martial arts master and sociologist Kenji Tokitsu (2012) speaks of this perfection in two different paradigms: one "pursued by an athlete or a practitioner of a sport" (p. 42), the other by martial artists. For us, in the present context, this difference is analogous to the difference between instruction and education, which we discussed at the beginning of this paper. The aim of martial arts—here expressed as the pursuit of perfection—is, ultimately, enlightenment: fulfillment of human potential in compassion and wisdom. Through serious and rigorous training, forged by the combative elements, the mind can become calm and steady across a range of conscious states and be sharpened like a sword to cut through delusions and distorted perceptions about ourselves and others. In applying this understanding of martial arts to education, the objective is not to cut down the annoying or threatening student upon whom our own fearful or infatuated distortions are projected!

The *Art* of Being Human

When associated with a particular practice such as the tea ceremony (*chado*) or calligraphy (*shodo*), understanding an art as a *do* or Way tells us that this activity has "surpassed its utilitarian purpose and has been raised to the level of art"

(Davey, 2007, p. 8). Martial arts as a Way are practiced not to defeat an opponent in battle but "to understand the ultimate nature of the whole of life by examining ourselves through a singular activity of life: to arrive at the universal through studying the particular" (Davey, 2007, p. 8)[3]. The universal concerns the dynamics of birth, death, growth, evolution, emergence, decay, and change, and the arts have the potential to teach us how to live, move, and dance with these dynamics.

Davey (2007) writes that understanding the *do* through one art gives the practitioner insight into the "principles, aesthetics, and mental states common to all the Ways" (p. 31). Any art form, when rooted in philosophies and practices for skillfully moving with and being moved by all of life's transition experiences, has tremendous potential for teaching us how to develop groundedness, mindfulness, integrity, compassion, cooperation, and creativity in the face of difficult circumstances. These qualities are important for educators who seek to address conflicts and challenges within themselves and with the students and peers they work with. Martial arts, if understood and practiced in the way we are addressing in this chapter, can illuminate certain aspects of mind-body connection, intuition, intention, presence, and attunement in interpersonal relationships, and reveal more about who the educator is and how they show up in the classroom.

The secret to a teacher's role and relationship with her students is that she is authentic and transparent with them, and that she manifests this way of being without giving up her authority or responsibility as teacher/leader/educator. She demonstrates her ability to set limits and be firm and decisive when necessary, which is very much in line with the martial arts view that we are professing: that the best fight is the one that does not take place. The ability to go elsewhere than a fight is based on relationship and on the ability to use a very finely tuned martial skill: namely, to anticipate what will happen before it happens and take action that will make the attack—or in a classroom, the disruption—unnecessary. Something else will be much more appealing and compelling. The resulting classroom culture may be counter to the cultures within which students have mostly lived. The teacher may be their first model, but the students can become culture carriers if the culture makes sense to them. At the least they will have a different experience in this class, and possibly they will carry some of this into their lives beyond the class. The ripple effect is possible, and we have seen it.

We draw on the Way of the true martial artist to say that the educator is prepared for what life presents at each and every moment. It will not help him or her to say, "This is not what I signed up for." The alternative in classroom environments that are populated with students in a constant state of fear and reactivity, always waiting for the next upheaval, threat, or frightening situation. Attempts to manage by coercing and removing students will be ongoing. Educators need to be equipped personally and professionally to respond to what is before them rather than constantly being in a state of reactivity and overwhelmed. We submit that the creation of environments counter to the mainstream culture is both possible and necessary, for the well-being of students and educators and for the overall cultural transformation that is so needed in school environments.

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[3] In the West, Aristotle made a similar distinction in examining knowledge that serves utilitarian purposes (*techne*) and knowledge that leads to development of one's humanity, which is reflected in the aims of liberal education (Levine, 1991, p. 8).

The implications for teacher education should be obvious to our readers. Teachers and pre-service teachers need education that speaks to the development of their wholeness, their ability to model that which they wish to have happen in classrooms, their facilitation skills, and a much increased knowledge of human beingness and how to work with it. Martial ways offer some of this knowledge; moreover, they offer fine-tuning as to how to be increasingly responsive to what is occurring in the moment.

We come to know ourselves more deeply through contemplative and artistic practices that refine the mind-body connection. With and through "art-as-Way," the possibility of living with authenticity in daily life becomes a reality. This authenticity arises from a lucid alignment between our actions and our feelings and beliefs. Davey (2007) reckons that cultivating mind-body unity through art—in our case, martial art—brings undiscovered talents and abilities to the surface, enabling us to bring the "force of our total being" (p. 90) to all of our actions. Imagine a teacher whose presence bears the force of his or her total being! Would such a teacher need to resort to external disciplinary actions and management techniques to control his or her students?

Cultivating Mind-Body Unity Through Martial Arts

The movement toward unity of mind and body is the essence of contemplative-artistic practices, such as the martial arts. What does such unity look and feel like? Yuasa (1987), Japanese philosopher and mind-body theorist, explains that in one's martial art training there comes a point where one experiences the entire body moving itself into spontaneous action without the direction of the intellect:

> [T]here is a state in which subject and object are not differentiated and the intellect and will are merged. It is a state in which the self and things are mutually responsive to each other; things do not move the self nor vice versa. There is only one world, one scene. (pp. 47-48)

When the self can penetrate the depths of the body, the body becomes a subject, and the mind "loses its opposition to objects; it gives up being ego-consciousness and experiences samadhi" (Yuasa, 1987, p. 72). The division between a conscious subject and an objective body to which one does something is dissolved. Yuasa's descriptions here are characteristic of what is known in the literature as "nondual" experience (Bai, 2002; Loy, 1997), in which the usual mind-body separation is overcome and one experiences a profound unity of being. Knowing from this state of being is a different order of epistemology than knowing from ordinary dualistic consciousness (Walsh, 1992).

A person who has achieved mind-body unity has a qualitatively different presence from one who has not. This difference is most often noticed in terms of animating energy and vibration. In Asian cultures, this energy or animating vibration is referred to as *qi* (氣 in Chinese characters), *ki* (Korean and Japanese), or *prana* (Sanskrit), and it manifests through the particular presence of a person. Arts in Asian traditions, especially the martial arts, work with and cultivate this energetic presence. For instance, Chinese actors have a way of describing good actors as having "radiating presence" (*fa qi*), whereas poor actors would be considered to have "no presence" (*meiyou qi*) (Riley, as cited in Zarrilli, 2009, p. 19). In these traditions, our existential core, being a fluid center, points less to a psychologized self and more to something alive and animated.

The animated organic body is activated and invigorated by the energy of the breath. This connection to breath is directly reflected in the Chinese character for *qi* (氣), which has two parts: steam (气) rising from rice (米) as it is cooked. *Qi* is not simply the breath and the blowing of steam but also the alchemical process of cooking something difficult to digest into something that has refined nourishment and energy (Cohen & Bai, 2008). In other words, there is a vital connection between matter (such as human bodies) and vitality. It is this connection that the martial arts, along with other embodiment practices, foundationally cultivate: "By undergoing training in specific modes of embodied practice, this energy associated with breath and its accompanying force or power enlivens and quickens one's awareness, heightens one's sensory acuity and perception, and thereby animates and activates the entire bodymind" (Zarrilli, 2009, p. 19). Through focus on the felt experience of the body while engaging in a practice such as Aikido, *taijiquan*, *neigong*, the Indian martial art *kalarippayattu,* or yoga, the activated body-mind can then be the source of the educator's actions.

We believe that the ability of the educator to be aware in the moment, self-regulate, and attend with love and care to his embodied experience is the measure of his or her ability to model this behavior to students and develop warmth, connection, and trust in the context of the teacher-student relationship. An educator's ability to perceive and understand students more holistically through heightening the his or her own embodied awareness supports a capacity to become aware of others' non-verbal or non-discursive experience:

> [B]ecause we are not isolated subjectivities trapped within our bodies, but share an intersubjective milieu with others, we must also specify that a somatic mode of attention means not only attention to and with one's own body, but includes attention to the bodies of others. (Csordas, as cited in Hervey, 2007, p. 98)

As the educator develops high degrees of awareness of her own body systems and mind-body connections, she can have greater attunement with students and tap into the capacity to empathize and have compassion toward herself and others (Siegel, 2007). If we are using our martial arts training well, we realize that the likelihood that we will ever use the martial techniques is quite small, and that the real purpose of the training is the inner training that nurtures our capacity to development a fully-alive engagement with life, including life in our classrooms, in the best possible ways.

Building the Energetic Container

Containment is our capacity to be conscious of, and to hold and let go of emotional charge in the body, particularly in our musculature. Our muscles are "psychomotor resources" (Bernhardt, Bentzen, & Isaacs, 2004, p. 139) that we can engage to support novel activities and handle challenging situations. In the thick of experiences that arouse particular emotions such as anger, joy, or shame, some muscles are tense and tight (hyperresponsive) and other muscles can be weak or collapsed (hyporesponsive). With trained body awareness, we can learn to create a container in the body that supports us in *psychosocial integration*, which is our ability to be ourselves while in connection with others.

Brantjberg (2004) suggests that establishing containment involves developing at least three "tools": centering, or sensing the core; grounding, or sensing a connection to the ground; and discerning boundaries, or sensing a difference between self and world (p. 231). Centering involves active capacity to initiate movement from the lower abdominal region, which roughly corresponds to the area around our center of gravity. This area of center, referred to as *dantian* in Chinese and *hara* in Japanese, is considered to be a source of power, and the martial arts traditions lay heavy emphasis on training this area. The ability to move our entire being from the center, however, is not about a particular point in our body. Aikido master Richard Strozzi-Heckler (1997) notes: "If center is the place we operate from, then the entire living body is center" (p. 79). Our body has a spatial and temporal dimension and a connection to earth. To center, from this perspective, "is to experience our body in a total way" (Strozzi-Heckler, 1997, p. 79). *Center* in these terms is a way of describing what is our core self or individuality: our unique center in the universe. In psychological terms, it is key to healthy differentiation from others.

Grounding involves the sense of our weight upon the ground. One feels the weight of one's arms on the desk, one's bottom on the chair, and one's feet on the ground. For some people, Brantjberg (2004) notes, such an experience is difficult to connect with, because fear and anxiety arise from not trusting that we will actually be held by the ground; we lift ourselves away from the ground, can't stand still, or are reluctant to stand at all (p. 234). Grounding gives us the basic ability to stay connected to our center under shifting circumstances. We can, through practices such as *neigong* and other martial or yogic arts, connect to the ground by surrendering the weight of our being to gravity. This does not mean collapsing but rather trusting that we can be supported by the ground.

Boundaries are about our sense of personal space—what is "me" and "not-me," or "us" and "them"—and emerge initially in the course of healthy development through the differentiation between the child and the mother. In the body we feel various sensations when our boundaries are respected or violated. For example, Brantbjerg (2004) observes that a strong "heartbeat, sweaty palms, held breath, an impulse to push with my arms, or similar sensations tell me that another person is too close to me at that moment, that my personal space is being pressured or invaded" (p. 238). Our ability to protect our center and claim our personal space is connected to the bodily impulses to say "no," to move toward what we want, and to move away from what we don't want. These impulses engage our whole being, particularly musculature and movement: we reach for what we want, push away what we don't want, and so on. Depending on our development, our muscles and tissues may be numbed, weakened, or hyperresponsive to these impulses, and some kind of embodiment training, be it the martial arts or body-based therapies, is vital to reestablishing a sense of healthy boundaries.

Why is building this energetic container important in education? In our re-visioning of education, we argued for a paradigm shift from a having-mode that prioritizes the accumulation of knowledge and skills to a being-mode that focuses on the cultivation of human *beings*. This shift represents a movement away from violating—however seductively—individuals' existential boundaries by means of forced ingestion of materials (content knowledge and skills) toward respectfully returning self-agency and self-regulation to individuals so that they can enact their freedom to choose, protect, and nurture themselves in keeping with their own sense of integrity and authenticity. This *way* fosters the cultivation of human beings who are existentially secure, calm, wise, generous, considerate, and compassionate. Such human beings can freely give and receive; negotiate boundaries and explore edges; and, in general, protect, support, nurture, and contribute to self and others. They know how to be unique individuals while simultaneously being members of a society.

In the following final section, we again offer a narrative to illustrate concretely the foregoing ideas about educator as martial artist.

Martial Arts Educator in Action

> *A man and a woman, both colleagues at a university, meet through a workshop and spark up a friendly connection through various activities and discussions. A friendship begins to develop over a number of*

> *months. They decide to meet up and discuss their shared research interests. When they get together, it strikes the woman that she is sexually attracted to this man. His physical beauty and the exuberant vitality he has about life and creativity evokes some sort of desire inside of her. There is a sense of excitement that is also uncomfortable, and her mind immediately goes to worrying about what her husband would think of her having these feelings in response to this man. She breathes into the anxious discomfort, relaxes the muscles in her face, and feels the sense of ground beneath her. She is aware of a fear that her inner state is showing and has a desire to hide. She deepens her breathing into her abdomen as she switches back and forth between paying attention to him as he speaks and paying attention to her own wobbly inner world.*
>
> *The meeting ends and she feels that the sexual energy has been dissipated, but she now has a contraction deep in her chest. Something inside feels threatened. She can feel her heart beating quickly and tensely, and she feels like a scared child that wants to hide. With the pain in her chest comes a sense of shame for having feelings of sexual attraction to another person. If she reveals them, she fears that respect will be withdrawn and she will be judged. Her first reaction is to downplay, ignore, and rationalize away the pain: "Of course people are attracted to others; it's human nature." The feeling of wanting to hide in shame, the contraction of her being, however, is very real, and she wants to turn toward it. It has lots of energy and it wants to move. She wants to heal the pain by finding a way of allowing it to move through her.*
>
> *She tells her colleague she was at the transformative edge of her comfort zone today. She tells him that she had feelings of attraction and sexual energy in her body and feels shame. In the moment of telling him, the tension that was in the core of her upper body vibrates from the ends of her fingers, through her chest, up her neck, and out her lips. She no longer carries the psychic burden. Although naming her experience is a risk, she trusts that she is received empathically by her colleague. They are able to speak about embodied ways of working with attraction in professional relationships.*

The woman in the story could have attempted to resolve the issue by ignoring her internal responses and pretending that they didn't happen or weren't difficult. She could have also decided to see her male colleague as the cause of her difficulty and resolved to avoid working with him so she wouldn't have another such experience. Perhaps she might have accused the man of making her uncomfortable and interpreted his invitation as flirtatious, which could have been the case. None of these approaches, however, would have resolved her core issue, which would likely crop up again in some other circumstance. We can easily imagine other situations where we are working with students or colleagues that bring up emotions that are uncomfortable and disruptive. For example, some teachers are fearful of aggressive males and may try to have these students removed—sent to another class, counseling, or assessment, or some combination of these—to avoid having to work with them in order to not have to experience fear (Cohen, 2014).

Cohen (2014) points out that teachers are faced with a tremendous amount of external pressure with little support and that this should be taken into consideration in any discussion on how teachers cope with challenging emotions. He notes, however, that there is always a personal and inner dimension to our classroom experiences and that we can resolve many situations if we are able to resolve our own difficult experiences. This is our inner work, and in this paper we have given a place of special attention and study to martial arts as an inner work methodology. Through martial arts we can develop skills that engage our personal, interpersonal, transpersonal, and spiritual dimensions (Cohen, 2009, p. 30).

In the above vignette, the emotions of excitement, desire, shame, and fear were very real for this woman, and she could not ignore them despite the rationalization that it is normal to have desires for others. Doing inner work with these emotions reveals that:

- we carry learned emotional responses that reveal themselves in the thoughts and bodily sensations we have (e.g. shame, the need to hide, tension, and contraction in the chest);
- thoughts and rationalizations can normalize our experience yet still not offer a way of working with the internal distress;
- the emotional charge is a dynamic sensation and has the potential to move in some direction;
- a desire to heal the old pain and be in a new relationship with the pain motivates action and creates opportunities for becoming more whole; and
- being empathically received by another person we trust supports this process.

Body awareness and a capacity to contain emotional charge offer the potential to curiously observe and examine the phenomena, whereby we can either name these phenomena internally or express them externally. As well, we can reflect on them, and consciously choose how to relate to them (Brantbjerg, 2009). The capacity to stay in touch with the embodied, sensuous dimension is vital to the healing process. Susan Aposhyan (1999) says that we are at our healing edge "when we are feeling old pain and aware of a new possibility at the same time":

> Even if that movement is only a tight throb, there is always movement in any sensation. By breathing and allowing the sensation to

> move as it wants to, it eventually sequences out, bringing us into a new position in the world (p. 174).

By identifying only with our learned emotional responses, we keep inflicting pain upon ourselves. If we look only to ideas and fantasies about the future without honoring the energy in the body, we can disassociate from our experience. Hence, embodied contemplative practices, such as the various martial arts we have mentioned in this paper, teach us to work with breath, sensation, and movement to give a birth to a new self and a new world in each pregnant moment of our being.

With a *Gassho*

It is dojo etiquette to bow with folded hands raised to one's chest (this gesture is called *gassho*) before exiting. With a *gassho*, we would like to say to our readers: we appreciate your bearing with us through our lengthy paper and participating in the ideas that we have put forward here, ideas that we know to be radical by most standards. We realize that what we are pointing toward is a transformation in education and, more broadly, a transformation in culture and consciousness. We do not see one without the other. If only culture changes, then we are left with, at best, a better set of rules, but rules nonetheless. Such a change diminishes the human potential for agency and full aliveness. Similarly, individual consciousness change is most likely to lead to individualism and isolation. Education that focuses on the intersubjective life of all citizens within educational environments has great potential to influence meaningful change, cohesive community, and the fullness of life.

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