

Critical Pedagogy meets Expressive Arts
Vivian Chávez, DrPH
San Francisco State University

It was my first day back from a year long sabbatical and I was asked to briefly present my scholarship to Public Health faculty and at San Francisco State University. Heart beating, breath quickening, my body alerted me to do things differently. Given the topic, I could not simply “present my research,” I would have to embody it. Taking my time, connecting with everyone in the room through purposeful eye contact, I took a breath. Standing with knees slightly bent, in a relaxed confident “stance,” I started with a poetic rendition of my personal mission statement.

I am a courageous compassionate woman concerned about the general disconnection within and between ourselves, the natural world and each other. I value relationships, creative expression, health and social justice. Culture matters to me. I belong to a global community in dignity and human rights. My service is education ~ my work, to facilitate peace through innovative teaching methods that bring the whole body into the classroom. My calling is movement ~ the goal, to unleash the transformative power of critical pedagogy and expressive arts in Public Health.

The words above took years to compose and longer to name as my “mission statement.” The language and gestures that accompanied this *spoken word* presentation purposely let the audience in. I was connected; creatively pointing to the values and context of my study. Research, through the body. During the 08-09 academic year I conducted sabbatical research to study the possibility of embodied teaching Community Health Education, Health Promotion and overall courses that prepare the future Public Health workforce. My interest was to expand the frame of critical pedagogy with expressive arts and somatic movement. I wanted to explore what happens when we move our bodies together in community with the goal of health awareness. For a number of years now my scholarship has been the application of teaching strategies to change hierarchical relationships and establish a healthy setting that fosters open exchange of ideas in the

classroom (Chavez et al 2005; Chavez & Soep 2006). Adding art and movement to a repertoire of experiential learning was appealing not only to create a positive and productive learning experience for the future public health workforce – but for myself and my fellow faculty colleagues.

Background

The seed for this project came a few years back when I had the opportunity to teach a new Health Promotion course that answered Sherry Shapiro's question from *Pedagogy and the Politics of the Body* (Shapiro, 1999), "where's the body in the curriculum?" As a registered yoga teacher since 2005, my first impulse was to add a yoga asanas (stretching poses) to the standard personal health curriculum. I wanted students to learn that Health is not a commodity to be bargained for. Health is our human right. It is a broad subject experienced in a deeply personal way through our bodies. And I thought that yoga, being a complimentary alternative health method and ancient spiritual art/science that brings body breath and mind together was the perfect fit. An estimated 14 million Americans practice yoga (Barnes et al 2002) making it one of the most popular mind-body health practices. I was about to build my curriculum around yoga and health when the room I was assigned to teach turned out to be a DANCE studio. Just knowing I would be teaching in a dance studio awakened my cellular memory and passion for dance as well as an accountability to explore further. In preparing to teach the class I came across the work of Anna Halprin. Reading Anna's book *Health and Healing* (2000) introduced me to the psychokinetic process and connections between dance, drawing, health and healing. Even more amazing was the possibility to take a weekend workshop at the Tamalpa Institute where I could expand my embodied teaching repertory.

The class was designed with 30% Cognitive/Didactic (Lecture, seminar presentations, group discussion); 40% Experiential (Movement, process exercises, somatic demonstrations); and 30% Practical/Applied (Student presentations, reports on outside experience). During the first 4 weeks students are introduced to broad health topics as well as creative tools for wellness. The next 8 weeks explore specific personal health topics through body maps, collage, & community events. The last 3 weeks are organized

around creativity and sustainability. Students work as teams to develop a *showcase* for promoting positive health. The weekly 3 hour class follows this general sequence:

- Verbal/Somatic check-in ~ to become aware of the overall mood of the group.
- Sensory awareness ~ to enter the body through personal and group movement.
- Topic of the day ~ to explore health & wellness from a knowledge base.
- Experiential learning ~ to make personal and global connections with the topic.
- Embodied closure ~ yoga poses that integrate the material and bring self-reflection.

I have been teaching through the body now four semesters, with 47 students registered this Fall. Students recognize that yoga and dance are cross-cultural activities that can reduce stress, decrease fatigue, increase self-awareness and bring balance into our lives. There is also the multicultural element, yoga and dance have been practiced in many forms for thousands of years all around the world and only recently have health institutions recognized their health benefits. As Anna states, “Dance as a healing art is customary in most cultures where it is used in community building, ritual and celebration. Dance has a highly integrative nature as it engages all the senses through movement, and expression.” (cite)

When I learned that Tamalpa offers a fulltime year long Expressive Arts and Somatic Movement Education Training Program I built my sabbatical around it. The Tamalpa Life/Art Process infuses movement with drawing and creative writing to access *old* known cross-cultural understandings of health and health care systems with *new* innovative ways of relating to each other that can increase community participation, personal transformation and social action. Tamalpa faculty and students provided me with a participatory learning environment that integrated theory and practice, honored diversity, and fostered embodied leadership, collaboration, critical thinking, and communication skills (with a special emphasis on the non-verbal).

Practical Application: To be a teacher, be a learner first

The Tamalpa pedagogy is interactive, with a focus on “the three levels of awareness.”

The body in movement offering sensation, the mind brings imagination, and the emotional level offers-up feelings and connections to stories hidden even from ourselves. The notion that “connecting with creativity what is inherent in each of us becomes possible. “ (Halprin?) resonates with Critical pedagogy. This type of teaching method and theory is characterised by experiential learning and active citizenship, consists of Freire's philosophy of emancipatory education (1970). Freire's insisted in collegial education where students are working together and finding meaning about the range of subjects in their lives. Like Dewey (...) advocated against traditional education involving authoritarian teachers telling their students what to think and when to question. More specifically, Freire argued against 'banking education' where the teacher makes 'deposits' in the student. Critical pedagogy is complimented with expressive arts as both are based upon enhancing resiliency, social capital and community building.

Daria Halprin wrote in *The Expressive Body in Life, Art and Therapy* (200?)

“ADD QUOTE”

.....The concept of embodied pedagogy draws attention to bodies as agents of knowledge production. Wilcox (2009) outlines a theoretical framework that connects embodied knowledge to lived experiences, performance, and bodily intelligence. Qualitative evidence suggests that embodied pedagogies foster a sense of community and challenge Eurocentric and male-centered systems of knowledge production predicated upon the body/mind binary. In the civic arena, activists use embodied pedagogies to provide emotional access to science-based information, and to mobilize for social change. (Wilcox, 2009). Understanding how movement affects efficiency can lead to understanding how the body communicates with itself. With the new emphasis on creating a connection between mind, body, spirit and emotion, body awareness represents the next frontier of education.

Conclusion:

Expressive Arts training at Tamalpa gave me the opportunity for self-study, personal reflection and cultural humility – through my own personal experience with the process.

My role as a social activist comes most alive when I am teaching in the classroom.

“Teaching a subject is not my priority. My priority is to bring out the truth and beauty of each person I work with as well as myself.” -Ken

Teaching with a joy of living that makes the classroom model the global community we want to be a part of.

I am part of an international network of inspired people bringing the arts into the world for growth, healing, communication and collaborative learning

References

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