

Awakening Teachers to their Presence:
An Experiential Course in Body Wisdom

Sara Ahangar Ahmadi, California Polytechnic State University
John E. Henning, Monmouth University
and
Farzad Goli, Iranian Institute of Higher Health

Abstract

This article describes a workshop that was designed and conducted for the benefit of teachers interested in developing their presence experience through body awareness. The workshop activities consisted of the practice of specific physical tasks accompanied by reflections on their impact on the presence experience. An understanding of the workshop dynamics will enable professional educators to: 1) foster presence through body awareness through the use of practical strategies; 2) understand presence as an awareness of the integration of body, thought, and emotions; 3) understand the relationship between increased body awareness and more positive student relationships; and 4) to understand the relationship between increased body awareness and more effective teaching.

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Contemporary education often focuses on cognition at the expense of the physical and emotional aspects of child development (Schoonmaker, 2009). In part, this has resulted from an increased emphasis on standardized testing as a measure of student and teacher productivity (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006). In an effort to boost test scores, schools prioritize cognitive approaches to instruction, often leaving teachers with little time to address the emotional and psychological development of the child (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006). The disproportionate emphasis on cognition occurs to the detriment of a child's physical and emotional needs while simultaneously adding to the stress level and difficulty the teacher is experiencing (Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2016).

An education devoted entirely to the development of abstract and technical mental facility, which lacks any vital connection with human meaning and substance, becomes itself a main agent of cultural impoverishment and the displacement of human concerns (Sloan, 1983, as cited in Gidley, 2007, p. 119).

In response to these concerns, many educators are advocating for a more holistic, experiential, and embodied approach to education (Gidley, 2007). One example is the increasing recognition that contemplative practices can promote learning and teaching on the physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual realms (Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2016). One of the most researched of the contemplative processes is mindfulness. The physical benefits that occur

from fostering mindfulness include an improved immune system, reduced stress, and a general sense of well-being. Cognitive benefits to mindful learning include openness to novelty, flexibility, enhanced metacognition, and a mindful orientation toward the present (Langer, 1989; Schoeberlein & Sheth, 2009). Interpersonal relationships are also improved due to increased empathy, compassion, and an enhanced ability to perceive nonverbal emotional clues (Schoeberlein & Sheth, 2009).

Less well known among contemplative practices is the experience of presence. Like other contemplative practices, the presence experience strives to cultivate an awareness of the here and now. Unlike many other contemplative practices, the presence experience places an especial emphasis on body awareness. Fostering presence is not solely cognitive, rather it involves cultivating an entire bodily interaction with the world: “Perception is our most basic mode of *being* in the world, and the body is the ultimate and abiding subject of all perspectives available to us in principle” (Carman, 2008, p. 3). Thus, increasing body awareness is a way to cultivate an awareness that helps individuals to connect with their mental, emotional, and physical workings (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006).

The focus of this article is to show how presence in teaching can be cultivated through a workshop on body awareness. The workshop involved the practice of specific physical tasks accompanied by reflections on their impact on the presence experience. An understanding of the workshop dynamics will enable professional educators to: 1) foster presence through body awareness through the use of practical strategies; 2) understand presence as an awareness of the integration of body, thought, and emotions; 3) understand the relationship between increased body awareness and more positive student relationships; and 4) to understand the relationship between increased body awareness and more effective teaching. Comments from participants are included to demonstrate the workshop’s impact.

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of the presence workshop described in this article was to cultivate the body awareness of teachers. Traditionally, practices such as meditation, mindfulness, Zen Buddhism, and yoga have been directed towards enhancing presence to improve the quality of lived experience. In recent years, the relevance of body awareness to professional practice has received increasing attention (e.g. Cuddy, 2015; Geller, 2017; Gendlin, 1992, 2003). The basis for such work is the interconnection among body, thought, and emotion (Carman, 2008). Each affects the other. For example, an anxious emotional state can lead to tensed chest muscles, tightened stomach muscles, and a clamped jaw; conversely, relaxing the body can lead to a more positive emotional state (Wilber, 1993). Thus, the purpose of fostering body awareness in a professional environment is to enhance mental and emotional functioning.

Body awareness can be cultivated through controlled breathing, adopting specific body postures, and applying methods for closely attending to physical sensations. For example, Geller (2017) described how therapists can cultivate therapeutic presence through controlled breathing and grounding, a practice that enables professionals to slow their thoughts and relax their bodies, thus inducing a more positive and open emotional state toward their clients. Grounding involves adopting a relaxed sitting or standing position while practicing controlled breathing (Rome,

2014). By consciously attending to their body posture and alignment, therapists can improve their mental and emotional states while enhancing their capacity to experience presence (Cuddy, 2015). A key element is noticing the physical sensations that occur during a session and interpreting their meaning (Geller; 2017). Gendlin's (2003) work on focusing offers a variety of techniques for fostering a "felt sense" of physical sensations that often pass unnoticed, but which can serve as an important source of information about the environment.

The workshop described in this article was developed through Bioenergy Economy (BEE), an integrative health model that originated from body-centered psychotherapy, mindfulness-based therapies, and bioenergy medicine (Goli, 2010). Key elements of the BEE approach are the regulation and the redirection of energy investment via body awareness. Central to this model is the idea of an embodied mind (Lakof & Johnson, 1999; Varela, Thomson, & Rosch, 2016). In other words, the perceptions of the body are an integral part of the mind's workings. The BEE model of health approach draws upon biosemiotics to explain how practitioners can mindfully interpret their experiences and behaviors through an understanding of semiosis – the flow of signs through and among systems. By cultivating an awareness of the body, energy-information currents can be guided toward higher levels of intra/inter/transpersonal integrity.

For more than 10 years, the Bioenergy Economy (BEE) system has been taught primarily for health promotion and therapeutic means. A primary tenet of this approach is the cultivation of presence, which can be defined as an increased state of awareness that fosters the physical, mental, and emotional workings of an individual and his/her social relationships (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006). The BEE approach to presence focuses on body awareness, thus enhancing energy flow through the removal of energy blocks and the reprocessing of energy pathways. Practitioners of BEE mindful and behavioral practices experience increased energy accompanied by reduced feelings of stress, pressure, and anxiety (Schoeberlein & Sheth, 2009). Thus, they become more present in their participation, more joyful in their affect-regulations, and more coherent in their narratives (Goli, 2010).

BEE mindful and behavioral practices can also promote benefits for already healthy individuals (Goli, 2005). A primary purpose of this workshop was to facilitate the professional development of teachers by fostering the presence experience through a greater awareness of the body and its energy flow. When teachers learn to cultivate their experience of presence through the body, their higher levels of energy and sense of well-being enable them to be more nurturing, to attend more carefully to the learning process, and to reflect without the mental noise associated with a lack of awareness (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006). Higher energy levels lead to healthier and happier interactions with students, a hallmark of more responsive teaching. Thus, becoming more present can improve both teaching and learning (Goli, 2010).

During the workshop, presence was cultivated at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal levels. At the *intrapersonal* level, presence involves a greater awareness of the integration of body, thought, and emotion. Change in any one of the three can affect the other two. The focus of the workshop, however, was to heighten awareness of the body in order to affect change in thoughts and emotions. At the *interpersonal* level, presence involves cultivating an openness to others, a sensitivity to their needs, and a willingness to engage completely with

them. Associated with an increased interpersonal presence are the qualities of love, empathy, and compassion. The *transpersonal* experience of presence is a transcendent state that has been described as “a state of awareness, in the moment, characterized by the felt experience of timelessness, connectedness, and a larger truth” (Silsbee, 2008, p. 20). Transpersonal experience can be attained through intuition, creativity, and peak experiences (Rowan, 2005).

The Workshop

The description presented in this article was based on a workshop provided for teachers at a Midwestern university. The participants included five teachers: three in-service teachers and two teaching fellows. The teaching fellows were masters’ students who also worked part-time at a school. The participants’ responsibilities were to attend all the sessions, practice the tasks formally and informally, answer the reflection prompts, and keep a journal. Every aspect of the design, including the workshop themes, the practical tasks, and the reflections were created to help the teachers cultivate their body awareness for the purpose of consciously experiencing presence in their classes and in life.

Workshop Themes

Seven themes were introduced during the workshop. The first three themes involved the intrapersonal experience of presence, with an emphasis on activities that enhanced awareness of the integration of body, thought, and emotion; including whole-body experience, whole-body perception, and awakening senses. The last four themes focused on the interpersonal experience of presence, including the IN/OUT unity, awareness expansion experience, body boundaries’ awareness, and intercorporeal dialog. The overall direction of the workshop themes moved from inside to outside, i.e. from the intrapersonal realm to the interpersonal realms of presence. In weeks 8, 9 and 10 of the workshop, the goal was to unify the intra- and interpersonal in a transpersonal experience of presence.

Practical Tasks

The purpose of the practical tasks, for example grounding or body balancing, was to develop an awareness of body postures that promoted states of well-being and interconnectivity. Conversely, the teachers also became aware when these states were absent. During each activity, participants were given specific instructions on how to experience the theme through their bodies, followed by guided meditation on their bodies, thoughts, and emotions. Formal practice of the task included the replication at home at least once every day; more informal practice occurred in real-life settings as the nature of the task and opportunity determined. The instructions for the task were audio-recorded and emailed to the participants to reinforce the procedures while minimizing any worries of forgetting the steps.

Reflections

The physical tasks were followed by reflections on the associated emotions and thoughts that accompanied the physical changes. The reflection papers were intended to amplify the effects of practices and stimulate additional reflection. The participants were also asked to journal their feelings and thoughts during the week. A primary goal of the reflections was to develop an awareness of the relationship between body, thought, and emotion. Specifically, the

participants were asked to remain aware of and report any changes in either their personal life or their teaching by:

- Observing the effects of presence in all aspects of life
- Observing their energy level and motivation for teaching
- Observing the effects of presence in teaching
- Observing the spiritual and holistic aspects of teaching

Sessions

The workshop was organized into 14 sessions that occurred over 10 weeks in 7 paired sessions according to the 7 themes. For the first four themes, participants met for eight sessions with two sessions per week for each theme. For the last three themes, participants attended one session per a week for six weeks, two weeks for each theme. The first session of each theme was 135 minutes, and the second session was 75 minutes. The first session usually began with answering participant questions and resolving any problems that might have arisen. The discussion provided a lead into the presentation and discussion of one of the themes. The final half hour of the session was allotted to practicing the theme by engaging in a practical task or exercise with the body. The session concluded with instructions on writing the reflection papers, which were due after the participants practiced the task for 10-14 days.

The second session of the week was intended to respond to any questions of the participants. It began with teachers’ feedback from their formal and informal practices. The instructor posed questions and added comments or additional ideas as appropriate. Participants frequently requested additional practice on the practical tasks, which were considered a routine part of the second sessions. (See Table 1).

Table 1. General Schedule of the Workshop

Sessions	Duration	Themes
First Session of Theme	135 minutes	Whole-body Experience, Whole-body Perception, Awakening Senses, In/out Unity, Awareness Expansion Experience, Body Boundaries Awareness, Intercorporeal Dialog
Second Session of Theme	75 minutes	Q and A

Note. Q and A = Questions and Answer

Theme 1: Whole-Body Experience

The purpose of the Whole-Body experience theme was to introduce the idea of the body as an embodied mind. Embodied mind references the body’s important role in perceiving and reflecting upon the surrounding environment, in contrast to the conventional view that equates the brain with the mind. The instructor initiated the session by asking several questions on participants’ expectations for the workshop, followed by a two-minute meditation to become more aware of bodily sensations. Then the body’s role in perception and thought was discussed from the three perspectives of physiology, phenomenology, and consciousness. Examples were shared, including examples from the lives of the participants.

Two important concepts were discussed in preparation for the practical tasks: “habitual body” and “body equilibrium.” Habitual body refers to the thoughtless physical postures that occur due to wrong assumptions and a lack of awareness. Some examples would include an unconsciously tensed muscle, slouched and cramped body postures, and rapid mouth breathing (Cuddy, 2015). Oftentimes, individuals do not notice their body’s discomfort because such posturing has become a habit for them. In contrast, “body equilibrium” refers to a well-adjusted body that lives in harmonious balance.

Practical tasks - The purpose of the tasks was to familiarize participants with body postures that lead to an increased flow of energy and a balanced, relaxed state of being. When these postures are successfully enacted, the participant gets grounded. Becoming grounded was often used as an initial move before undertaking further meditations of the body.

To begin grounding, the participants were asked to stand, close their eyes and relax their spine. Then they pulled their shoulder blades up towards their ears, pressed them into their back, then pushed them out away from each other and released them down the back. The chest and scapula should be wide open and the shoulders relaxed. In fact, these poses are intended to create tension as the body becomes straighter before gently letting the tension go. Next, the participants elevated their necks by moving the crowns of their heads upward. They firmed their hip muscles and let their tailbone spontaneously come forward to lessen the lumbosacral curve. The hip muscles were released little by little without letting the tailbone go back to its previous position. The tailbone should stay a bit forward. After each move the participants were advised to release any tension. To do so, there should be at least a two-minute pause between each of the Whole Body Experience phases.

During the second phase of this task, participants were told to imagine a plumb line dropping from their nose to the ground. Then the instructor asked the participants to shift their weight to the right, then to the left foot, and then to the center until the imaginary plumb line remained straight in front of the navel. During the third phase the participants were guided to imagine a line of energy up their inner thighs to the groin, and from there through the core of the torso, neck, and up and out through the crown of the head. They were instructed to feel the flow of energy; their awareness of the energy flow helped balance the body and helped the muscles to be effortlessly relaxed and elevated – from the bottom of the spine to the top of the neck and the bottom of the skull. At this point, all the muscles had to be in harmony, the spine had to be fully elevated and symmetric, the vertebrae was supposed to be aligned and in their correct places, and the body was expected to be effortlessly elevated and balanced.

In Phase Four, participants are instructed to extend their inner harmony by letting awareness spread in the whole body as a drop of ink dissolves in a fluid. The whole body should be aware, open, and receptive to the outside environment, including its outer harmony with the earth and with the sky. Without leaving the pose, participants were asked to open their eyes and observe the wholeness with open eyes for 2 minutes. To leave the pose, participants were instructed to bend their knees and maintain the sense of harmony for a longer time.

Reflections - During the second session of each theme, the teachers’ feedback consisted of stories about their body postures in different situations. For example, they shared several

stories on how they tried to balance the weight of the bags they carried on their shoulder or how they tried to stand straight in the class while teaching. Furthermore, they commented on their observations of how the newly gained awareness had affected the quality of their lives, such as fewer feelings of stress, moments of joy, and improved relationships with family, students, and colleagues. Because the workshop did not have a financial or academic compensation, showing the teachers the benefits of the physical tasks was critically important for eliciting their commitment to regular practice.

Theme 2: Whole-body Perception

The primary purpose of the Whole-Body Perception theme was to demonstrate the interrelationship of body, thought, and emotions. The instructor gave examples of how this integration can be fostered through an awareness of how the body influences thought, emotions, and interactions with others. She explained how participants can develop their knowledge and practice of body-thought-emotion integration by observing and exploring their inner sensations, impulses and movements, and reactions. The efficient energy flow caused by this integration helps the participants to feel more unity, harmony, and higher levels of body awareness (Goli, 2010). To help the participants become aware of non-integrative states of being, the instructor introduced the concept of fragmented body. The fragmented body is not observed as a whole but rather as separate parts that are vulnerable due to their lack of coordination.

Practical tasks - Whole-Body Perception practical tasks involved showing the participants how to ground themselves from a seated position. Participants were guided to sit on a chair with their soles of their feet completely spread on the earth; eyes closed or half-closed. They were instructed to align the spine with the back of the chair so that the body stayed aligned without further pressure. Participants pulled their shoulder blades up, pressed them into the back, then widened them across and released them down the back. Next, they were instructed to move the crown of their head upward so the neck is pulled out of the body. The neck should be elevated and relaxed, the arms relaxed, and the hands resting on the lap. All the weight should be on the hips and thighs. Participants should move the lumbosacral (lower back) to the back of the chair and increase its curve in order to let awareness spread across the body by fostering a bodily state of receptiveness, openness, and alertness,

Reflections - The experiences shared by participants focused primarily on the integration of body-thought-emotion. For example, one participant stated that she was more observant of her body posture, and as a result, she felt more comfortable while interacting with students. The session culminated by reviewing the reflection prompts for the following session and a call to continue the formal and informal practices of the task.

Theme 3: Awakening Senses

The Awakening Senses theme was intended to heighten awareness by awakening the senses of hearing-seeing-smelling to an increased openness to the environment. The first session began by discussing the systems that govern environmental processes, and the role of the senses as the means for connecting to those systems. The instructor then introduced the concept of synthetic perception, which focuses on the direct perception of the environment (i.e. gathering data from the senses without judgment or interpretation). In contrast, analytic perception relies more on mental images, pre-assumptions, and analysis of the situation. The participants were

encouraged to foster their presence awareness by deemphasizing their pre-existing cognitive judgements of their environment through the practice of a direct, synthetic approach to perception.

Practical tasks - To begin the Awakening Senses practical task, participants were grounded in the sitting position (see the Whole Body Perception task above). Next, participants directed their attention to what they are hearing. Participants were to pay attention to every single sound, low or loud, that exists within hearing. They moved their attention from one sound to another sound, then let their attention and awareness be attracted and absorbed by a sound that is more pleasant. After a minute of listening to one sound, they let their awareness spread (expand) homogeneously and uniformly to the other sounds within hearing. Any time a sound attracted their attention, the participants would smoothly let awareness and focus return to them. The participants stayed in this pose as long as desired.

Next, the participants focused their attention on smelling by repeating the same steps given for hearing. They were instructed to pay close attention to their perceptions to gauge any changes in their feelings. Then, the participants were encouraged to expand their awareness to include all the scents and sounds. Afterwards, they opened their eyes and gently gazed forward, while continuing to focus on the senses of hearing and smelling. The participants were instructed to hold the pose as long as desired.

Reflections - Now in the second week, the participants began sharing their experiences without any prompting. They found the task relevant to both their lives and their teaching. They posed questions about how to practice it with their students and commented that sense awareness helped them feel more comfortable in the classroom. The instructor told the participants they could continue practicing the task informally by remaining aware of their senses throughout the day. They were also asked to extend sense awareness to touching and tasting senses.

Theme 4: IN/OUT Unity

In/Out Unity was the formal beginning to the interpersonal relationship and the inside-outside movement. The purpose of this theme was to develop an understanding that the body can be understood as an ongoing interaction with the environment (Gendlin, 1992). The instructor opened up by showing how the terms self/other exist as one entity in the real world. To further illustrate this concept, she then contrasted the difference between I-It and I-Thou relationships (Buber, 1970). I-It relationships consider other people as objects of the relationships and I-Thou relationships accept the other person as unique and part of our being. In the I-Thou relationship, “the whole net of personal communications and relationships is more in flow” (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski & Flowers, 2004; p. 157). Recognizing this difference leads to higher quality interpersonal relationships in all respects (Rome, 2014).

Practical Tasks - The practical task for this session was geared towards the practice of moving from inside to outside awareness. Participants were asked to ground themselves in the sitting position, then place their attention on their inhalations and exhalations. They were instructed to witness air flow through their nostrils without trying to change their natural process of breathing.

In the second phase of the task, the instructor encouraged the participants to let their awareness accompany the air into the depth of their lungs and then return with that air from the depth to the surface, the nostrils, and to the outside area. The participants focused their awareness on the cycle of breathing, from without to within and from within to without. The instructor encouraged them to observe awareness as it spread beyond within and without until awareness is in complete harmony and wholeness. There is no inside and outside, no borders and no thing, just a space of awareness, an aware void. Participants were encouraged to stay in this phase as long as desired.

During the third phase, the participants opened their eyes and let them rove aimlessly while maintaining their awareness of the “in and out.” They were instructed to witness their breath awareness with open eyes and to let the awareness spread throughout their bodies before leaving the pose.

Reflections - The participants asked many questions about I-It/I-Thou relationships and how they applied to their daily life. To illustrate, the instructor used the metaphor of a chess game to illustrate how I-It relationships are goal oriented, competitive, and focused on the moves of our opponents. I-It relationships are like playing a game for gain. In contrast, I-Thou relationships are best illustrated by the “dance” metaphor. When dancing, each person can express him or herself while moving in harmony with the others. There is no win-lose, goals are accomplished through the joy of participation, and there is a sense of mutual becoming among the participants. The instructor asked participants to further practice this theme by attending to their activities as a dance and observing the effects in their lives.

Theme 5: Awareness Expansion Experience

The purpose of this theme was to develop an understanding of the presence experience as a way of being. To do so the instructor compared the relationship between doing and being through two metaphors: dancing and the mobius. Dancing involves movement and action, but there is almost no focus on the outcome of the action. Similarly, doing and being coexist as a mobius, an exterior and interior that are inseparable. The existence of one without the other would be meaningless. The discussion around this theme was intended to develop an awareness of this relationship by considering presence qualities such as fluidity, empathy, and authenticity.

Practical tasks - Similar to other practical tasks, Awareness Expansion begins with the participants grounding themselves in a comfortable position, then letting the awareness spread all over the body. The participants were instructed to let the awareness flow from the nostrils and observe how the cool air gets in and warm air gets out. Without changing the rhythm of their breathing, they observed it becoming more relaxed. The instructor let them know that there is no need for action: *being* is easy and pleasing.

Participants were instructed to direct their awareness to the boundaries of their bodies, their skin; letting their awareness be in contact with their clothes and their senses. Then, they took their awareness beyond the body boundaries, letting it expand as far as they felt comfortable and secure. At this time, the instructor introduced music. The participants harmonized with the music by setting their imagination free. The instructor encouraged the participants to focus solely

on the music, saying, “There is no boundary and no thing. There is just an aware void. Let this aware void be one and in harmony with the music.”

Participants were encouraged not to consider the origins of their awareness or their current state of awareness. Instead, they were instructed to just be in their bodies and to let their awareness come naturally and easily. After the music stopped, they opened their eyes and enjoyed the expanded awareness with their eyes fixed on the ground. The participants maintained this posture for a few minutes.

Reflections - The participants posed questions on how to become more open regarding their boundaries. They also said they could feel presence through surprising moments and the extension of their boundaries.

Theme 6: Body Boundaries’ Awareness

The purpose of the Body Boundaries Awareness theme was to understand how the three experiences of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal presence pertained to teaching and the classroom environment. Body boundaries’ awareness is an awareness of visceral space. This understanding is not only the reflection of what goes on in the head or social rules, it can also refer to the relationship between how an individual knows and accepts her true self and the way she knows herself in relation with other people (Rome, 2014). Thus, the instructor discussed the intrapersonal experience of presence as the integration of body-thought-emotion; the interpersonal experience of presence as connections to students, subject matter, and pedagogical knowledge; and the transpersonal experience of presence as a holistic vision of teaching. Previously introduced concepts were revisited throughout the session, such as the integration of body-thought-emotions, the development of I-Thou relationships, and the interaction between systems in the environment.

Practical tasks - For the Body Boundary Awareness task, participants were grouped in pairs and stood about 10 feet from each other. Participants grounded themselves and one of the partners in each pair was designated as active. The active partner invited the other partner to get closer by moving her hand. There was no talking during this task, so all action was initiated through body movements. The passive partner moved until the active partner used her hand to stop her. The distance at which the stop sign is shown was adjusted depending on the feelings and senses of the active partner. When the stop order is given, both partners stop and witness their body reactions and each other’s presence.

Again, the active partner checked herself and if the distance was not comfortable enough, asked the partner to move forward or backward. The passive partner also observed her boundaries and awareness but followed the lead of the active partner. Finally, the active partner asked her passive partner to go back to the 10-foot distance. Then the partners changed roles. The critical point of this task was listening only to the feelings of the body. For example, the participants should not ignore their bodies feeling of comfortable distance based on the responses of their partners; being physically close is not equivalent to being close or intimate. Furthermore, the participants should not judge or act based on social values. They should trust their body in the belief that the body knows its most comfortable distance.

Reflections - Participants reported practicing the task with family members. They noticed the greater difference in boundaries in the work place versus their relationships at home. They also shared their stories on their presence experiences and the changes in empathy, non-judgment, novelty, and openness they experienced in their classrooms and in themselves.

Theme 7: Intercorporeal Dialog

The Intercorporeal Dialog theme of the workshop aimed at integration of the intra/inter/transpersonal experience of presence. The primary purpose of the theme was to show how each of these presence experiences could foster more satisfying and effective participation within a larger human system. Like the integration of body, thought, and emotion at the intrapersonal level, this lesson encouraged the participants to view themselves as a part of, rather than separate from, the larger system. Intercorporeal dialog is similar to how two invisible and distinctly different gases, oxygen and hydrogen, combine to make water. Similarly, two separate individuals in a relationship become something different than they were individually. Human beings are constantly changed through all the interactions occurring around them (Rome, 2014).

The instructor reinforced this viewpoint by leading a discussion on several ideas from previous lessons, including, but not limited to, the unity of body-thought-emotion over fragmentation in the intrapersonal experience of presence; the importance of empathy, compassion, and love for the effective participation in “we-space;” and the emphasis on “being” over “doing” in the transpersonal experience of presence. The discussion focused on the interrelationship of these ideas and the influence of each on the other.

Practical tasks - For the Intercorporeal Dialog Task, the participants again grounded themselves, then paired up with one partner designated as active. This time they stood at arm’s length from each other (about three feet), and the partners put the palms of their hands together. The active partner moved her hand in any direction she chose, moving her partner’s hand with her own. As the hands moved, the participants were instructed to stay aware of their bodies. When the instructor asked them to stop, they both put their hands to their sides. The participants took five minutes to scan their bodies, feel their senses, observe their feelings, and witness their reflections. In the second phase of the task, the participants exchanged roles and repeated the steps. In this phase of the task, neither of the partners was designated the active partner: both participants let their bodies lead them until the instructor asked them to stop. After each phase of the task, participants reflected on their awareness of their body senses, feelings, and reflections.

Reflections - Participants talked about their plans to continue their transpersonal journey after the workshop. They shared concerns about their bodies, looked back on what they had learned, and talked about the impact of the workshop on their teaching and lives. The impact of the workshop is discussed more fully in the section below.

Impact

During and immediately after the workshop, participants reported changes in both their personal and professional lives. A few examples are presented below for the dual purpose of illustrating both the potential impact of this particular workshop and to anticipate the types of comments that could be encountered. On the intra- and interpersonal levels, participants may

report increased energy and better relationships. At the transpersonal level, participants may report a renewed and revised perspective on teaching that leads to a more responsive and holistic approach, as described in the examples below.

Energy

During the initial sessions of the workshops, participants were more likely to report on the intrapersonal experiences of presence. They included comments on relationship between their body posture and emotions, their emotions and thoughts, or sense of increased energy, as illustrated by the following statement from one of the participants:

I would say a lot of days I am tired at the end, but it's a good tired, you know. You feel like you got your work done and you feel satisfied... I do feel more alive in my class and I do feel more energetic. Now, when I feel tension or stress in my body, I stop and think, why am I feeling tension or what is causing this?... I also noticed that if I have had an emotional day or bad news, that I carry the emotional pain in my body and I have a hard time getting rid of it.

Relationship

As the workshop progressed, participants began commenting on a change in their relationships with students and their influence on teaching, as illustrated by the following comments: "I want to physically be there, be present in the lesson. I guess, rather than just I'm here; they're there doing a lesson. I wanna be in it, be part of it." One of them further described this change as "Now I have a different view of the teacher-student relationship/system. I am still finding the right balance; actually I think the balance will continually shift back and forth from controlled to controller without feeling the boundaries of either."

More Responsive Teaching

As the workshop unfolded, the interpersonal experience of some participants resulted in an enhanced openness, receptivity, creativity, flexibility, and empathy. They began listening more attentively and judging students less, sometimes leading to the adoption of new approaches that foster reflection, self-directedness, authenticity, and care towards developing a whole person, as illustrated by the following quote. "So I've been trying to give them more examples, give them time to write, give them time to talk about it, give them time to interact with each other. You know so you can work with your friend, come up with an answer, present it back to the class."

More Holistic Approach

During the workshop, participants came up with the approaches that body awareness and presence could be applied in their students' learning and curriculum. Because the teachers found body awareness and presence to be beneficial, they tried to investigate how they can lead their students to experience presence and become more holistic individuals. These approaches can optimize teaching and learning qualities.

My perspective in my teaching, in regards to presence, has changed because I feel that before I was functioning like a robot or a machine. This was not an example of teaching in the present... Now I see that the goal is not always the purpose of something...

Shouldn't I be happy that the students enjoyed the process, but did not happen to meet the goal? In some circumstances, I can let go of the end goal and actually make the goal the process. I see that now, whereas before I would never have seen it that way. Now, I am able to actually SEE what is happening in my room and with my students and make better choices and observations about the students, the lesson, and my teaching.

Comments such as the one above were not reflective of every participant. Their self-reports varied according to their readiness for the workshop, their understanding of the concepts, the investment they make in practicing the tasks, and their interest in and ability to reflect. However, the above do reflect the kind of comments that are possible with interested participants in an effectively conducted workshop.

Essentials for Fostering Presence

To effectively foster the presence experience through a workshop requires four essential components. First, the instructor of the workshop should have expertise in transpersonal work. An instructor without experience would not be able to notice those special moments of connection in class, observe their impact on participants, or answer practical questions about the experience (Burke, 2009). Although each pair of sessions was planned around a theme and assignments were collected based on the objective of every session, the instructor was careful to provide ample flexibility, openness, and acceptance by preparing herself for the unexpected questions by extensive readings on the topic. The workshop had a flexible and open framework, as well. The instructor of the workshop described in this article was a teacher with 9 years of transpersonal experience and 13 years of teaching experience who had been going through her own journey of self-awareness for an extended time.

Second, practicing the tasks is absolutely essential to increasing body awareness. Practice can be partially facilitated through exercises conducted during the workshop. To foster practice, the physical tasks should be chosen that are relevant to the experience of teachers and conducted in a way that is acceptable to participants. Emphasizing the practical benefits can be a helpful motivational strategy. Such benefits would include increases in joy and energy and a reduction in physical pain, anger and tiredness, and negative thoughts. Although this approach may motivate participants to try these exercises, much more work is needed to realize their benefits. Teachers must invest the time to explore different ways that these tasks can be formally and informally applied in their lives and their teaching. Presence develops over time through regular practice and exploration in various situations.

Third, the participants should be given every opportunity to reflect upon any changes they are noticing in their teaching or in their lives. A major goal of the workshop was to provide the ground for the teachers to discuss, practice, and share their experiences of body awareness in their own way and in their own setting. For example, after each theme was introduced, teachers were asked to discuss the topic and share their previous experiences with the same topic. The instructor remained open, receptive, and allowed the teachers to expand on the topic in their own words. To further nurture the teachers' perspectives, the instructor assiduously avoided making prescriptive suggestions concerning the nature of the presence experience. The participants were

encouraged to discover presence on their own through practice and reflection on the practical tasks.

Fourth, the workshop tasks and reflections should be focused on presence as it occurs in educational settings. The focus on education also facilitated group discussions because the teachers tended to share many of the same issues. All of the discussions should be conducted in a flexible format to allow participants to introduce issues from their own experiences. To serve this purpose, participants should be encouraged to bring their experiences to class and share them with each other. The participants will see more value in the workshop if they find the topics relevant to their own environment. Furthermore, that enables instructors to build rapport by creating a dynamic atmosphere where real questions and issues emerge and are addressed.

Conclusion

In this article, the authors presented a practical approach to cultivating presence via body awareness. A workshop on the presence experience can present a proper means for teachers and teacher educators on the practical ways to introduce holistic education into the curriculum. Participants practiced and learned how body awareness can be activated through the practical tasks and extended to influence both their professional and personal lives. Because of the experiential nature of the workshop, all of the tasks were designed in such a way that participants can practice, observe, and reflect on the results in their classrooms. Through their professional practice of presence, teachers can synthesize, integrate, and devise new approaches to teaching the whole child.

The benefits from engaging in such work are very promising. They include increased energy, better relationships, a more responsive and creative approach to teaching, and a more holistic approach to teaching and learning (Hwang, Bartlett, Greben, & Hand, 2017; Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2016; Ziaian, Sawyer, Evans, & Gillham, 2015). Other bi-products of enhanced presence are non-judgmental, empathetic, compassionate, and flexible attitudes in class (Richards, 2009; Ziaian, Sawyer, Evans, & Gillham, 2015). These attitudes foster an implied understanding that their students are partners in a reciprocal process of learning. Furthermore, these benefits are not limited to the classroom, but could potentially have an impact on other aspects of teachers' lives, resulting in greater happiness, more energy, and better relationships with their families and friends. Thus, fostering presence through enhanced body awareness could lead to a rebirth of both the professional and the person.

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