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Unfolding Bodymind

Exploring Possibility Through Education

Edited by Brent Hocking, Johnna Haskell, and Warren Linds

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Unfolding Bodymind is a gathering of bold, fascinating ideas by twenty-one educators exploring the frontiers of contemporary educational thought and practice. The authors are engaged in various ways with the task of overcoming the philosophical separation of the mind from the physical world that has characterized Western culture, especially our educational practices, since Descartes at the dawn of the scientific era. Reporting their experiences in diverse learning situations (from college classrooms to scuba diving instruction to theatre warm up exercises), they investigate how learning is immersed in the world and takes place only through purposeful action and dynamic relationship. Body and mind form an inseparable whole; thus, knowing is no longer simply a "cognitive" process but an engagement of the integrated "bodymind" with the environment. The authors describe how thought is intrinsically infused with feeling, desire, and sensation, and therefore the task of education is to "rekindle our senses." When we no longer view the human self as an independent, isolated atom (as assumed in so many of the methods and techniques of modern schooling) but as constituted in interaction with the world, then learning is not a dry acquisition of information but a reaching out to the world with a sense of wonder to explore new possibilities.

Inspired by several streams of unconventional thinking--Buddhism, phenomenology, the holistic biology of Francisco Varela and Humberto Maturana, and an exquisite ecological sensibility such as that in David Abram's work (*The Spell of the Sensuous*)--the authors construct a strong philosophical foundation for a holistic understanding of knowing, teaching, and learning. To express their unfamiliar insights, many of them play with conventional language to make it serve a more holistic, relational view of the world. For example, the editors replace "understanding" with the term "interstanding"; several authors insert poetry and free verse into their essays; words are sometimes broken up with parentheses or slashes to emphasize their root meanings or their ambiguity. This book challenges the reader to step out of the linear, overly rational discourse that has conditioned our worldview.

With the exception of Abram and Canadian theorist David Jardine (whose writings grace this collection), most of the authors are largely unknown young scholars whose work has not yet circulated in established academic or professional circles. They came together at a conference in Vancouver in May, 1999 to share their experiences and ideas about "enactive" and embodied learning, and their chapters are carefully revised versions of their conference presentations. One of them, Franc Feng, suggests that that conference "may turn out to be a watershed in holism and ecological discourse ... which contributed to the reversal of anthropocentric greed and arrogance towards a discourse of love, compassion, humility, and reverence for all life."

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