

## MY FRIEND JOHN (From: <http://implicity.org/DavidLearn.htm> - May 1989)

My life, owing in large part to my somewhat unique vocation, enables me to be in dialogue with people about the essence of learning (for me the process of the content of consciousness) 20 to 30 hours a week. It has been so for nearly 3 years and I can't express enough the gratitude I feel for having had such a wonderful environment of challenging and encouraging friends and family. One special new friend I am particularly grateful for is John Vasconcellos.

John is a very unique human being. Not only does he enjoy and become animate in dialogue about our shared human condition, he has had some remarkable and insightful personal experiences which illuminate and inform his gentle and encouraging but challenging nature. John has a somewhat different view of the significance of learning than I and exploring that view has indeed been enriching. **John has had personally validating experiences about the relationship between psychological rigidity and patterns of bodily, physical, organizations. His process of being more open and alive, of overcoming what he learned before he was aware of learning - of becoming more open, is what he calls body-work.**

The underlying philosophy about John's body-work arises from the fact that human beings are more than what is behind the brow. That human experience is a full being phenomena, extending throughout our whole physicality. This of course is not a new idea, the fact that our whole nervous system is one with the brain and with the body is most certainly true, we only separate them in classifying - they are all integral in a larger whole. But what John is saying is that those of us who are aware that we are "blocked", obstructed from being open enough to truly be ourselves and experience the world, shouldn't confine our inquiry to the space between the ears. That, emotions and thoughts are process of the whole body, and thus so are the blocks. **That these learned blocks can best be seen as patterns of physical organization which we have acquired to brace ourselves from unpleasant experiences. Trying to stop from crying, stiffening our shoulders in fear, tightening our whole body to avoid trauma, these things we did as children left patterns of organized knots in our physicality which persist into adult hood and tether our capacity for whole experience. From such a perspective these blocks combine to act like a psycho-physical straightjacket, which by its nature excludes our conscious awareness of its existence.**

Having somehow experienced this wholly, not just the idea, John has been doing his body work for some 14 years. A great deal of that time he worked with a somatic therapist ([Stanley Keleman http://www.centerpress.com](http://www.centerpress.com)) who taught him that the first step in untying the knots or blocks was becoming sensitive to their existence. The therapist uses a descriptive example roughly like this:

***Imagine that you have clinched your fist very tightly and for so long that you are no longer aware of doing it. To unclench it, you must first become aware that it is clinched and then proceed to clench it even tighter. In the act of clinching it tighter you reestablish awareness and proprioception and can then relax it.***

John has come to feel this must happen to a vast network of subtle knots distributed throughout the body.

I had, before that day we spent together, understood the logic of all this, what John did was make me experience its reality. By talking me into a deep breathing state of relaxation he asked me to focus my awareness on every little muscle in my neck and shoulders. Then, as my awareness was tuning in, to slowly move my shoulders searching for little pockets of resistance.

As I encountered them he said, breathe deeply with the pocket focused in awareness - deepen your perception of it. Finally, as the awareness of the block was deepest, he said to move my body in ways that I felt would relax it. I did this and had the definite experience of a vivifying bubble burst - an expansion to the dimension and richness of awareness.

That experience, others from that day and since, have co-implicated the relationship between learning and being, and the fact the human being's first learning is bodily organizations. In addition to having a process revealed, this experience served to deepen my sense of conviction that human learning is initially time-blind, indeed constructs time, for here again was evidence that as small children we learn in ways which constrain our capacities for learning.