

Being Before Knowing

"Was I five or six? Certainly not seven. It was a morning in early summer. A silver haze shimmered and trembled over the lime trees. The air was laden with their fragrance. The temperature was like a caress. I remember – I need not recall – that I climbed up a tree stump and felt suddenly immersed in Itness. I did not call it by that name. I had no need for words. It and I were one." (Bernard Berenson)

The joy expressed here is the joy of recognition, a delighted awareness that knowing and being are in some way coincident and continuous within a larger process and that this kind of knowledge is in itself an achievement of psychological balance.

Edith Cobb on "Wonder and Knowledge"

in *Ecology of Imagination in Childhood*, pg.32

If you googled the phrase "being before knowing" on May 4th, 2004 you would have prioritized about 3,200,000 websites (in .18 seconds) and none of them contained this phrase "being before knowing." There was no thought of "being before knowing" in cyberspace at that particular cybertime, perhaps because cyberspace is where so much is known but no one is. On May 9th just five days later, "being before knowing" turned up 3,430,000 sites (in .11 seconds) and the top priority site was still entitled "Taking medication *before knowing* you're pregnant." The phrase "being before knowing" was a star yet to be observed in cyberspace using the fastest and most powerful search engine in the spring of 2004.

"Being before Knowing" is a slogan that may one day replace Rene DesCartes' insanely destructive slogan, *cogito ergo sum*, "I think therefore I am." But over a year later on May 25th, 2005, if you googled the phrase "being before knowing"? – not found on 17,800,000 websites in .20 seconds! In just one fifth of a second you can know that the cold evil of mind/body dualism is still very dominant on a web which is both mindless and bodiless. A year has passed. Five or 6 times more information has been amassed and accessed. Almost 18 million websites do not contain the simple philosophical or "love-of-wisdom" phrase, being before knowing, ontology before epistemology. The common sense insight "WE are before WE think" has difficulty emerging from the current behavioral sink. Dismal science is still splitting the world into fragments or "bytes" and "caches" roughly 18 million times faster than joyful science can put it back together again.

Similarly, googling "primary communication" turns up 5,950,000 sites but only a few of them put "primary" before "communication" in any 'being before knowing' way. The first site of the (by now) six million, reverses my argument: "Semiologists see language, particularly verbal language, as the primary communication system. . ." and only the fifth site on the list makes the point: "Facial Communication: A Primary Communication System." The second site takes you to Deming Elementary School where there are two good sentences about the importance of eye contact and interaction skills for troubled children. Going through the first sixty of the six million sites there are phrases like "take theory or certain primary communication principles into account" or "Individuals in Organizations: Primary Communication Experiences." On the few sites where "primary" occurs before "communication" it is almost always just an adjective in front of a noun. In sum, there is no advanced theory or developed body of

knowledge out there about “being before knowing” or “primary communication” as a foundation for full human living, full expression, creativity, zest and joy.

Before reading further, I hope you will stop and think your own thoughts for a minute about why this information about what’s missing on the web is so important.

Why is “being before knowing” the 3 word slogan that must replace DesCartes’ absurd five word formulation “I think therefore I am” if we are to survive as a species?

And why should children learn many “primary communication” skills before learning reading, writing and arithmetic?

Please put your answers to these questions in writing and we’ll put them in the next edition of Born to Groove.

All the information about primary communication we might find useful is found on the web under “nonverbal communication” and “body language.” Thousands of websites, lots of Centers, Institutes, journals, books, that appear to accept the Cartesian split of mind and body as axiomatic; thousands of sites that do not start with a challenge to the prevailing mind over matter, mind over body, verbal over nonverbal worldview. If you are one of those literate and idealistic people fascinated by intelligence, IQ, cognition, thinking, having your own 'mensa moments,' then there is plenty of reading to do, lots to think about, many ways to focus your separated mind on the issues at hand.

So what’s the problem? We ask each other “How are you?” each day. Well, often we don’t really mean it. Or we don't mean "How are you?" Most of the time we don’t really want to know about someone’s “mode of being,” we don’t really care what’s behind our child’s or neighbor’s frown or worried look. That's a problem.

And here's a bigger problem. (I hope this concluding paragraph seems "dated" a few years from now; if it does, treat it as a folk parable from a difficult era in a strange land.) Many of us do accept at face value the amazing primary communication skills of a Ronald Reagan or a George W. Bush whose knowing winks and grace under pressure, whose nods and shrugs, whose solid grips and glowing grins, whose actions are the attraction and much louder and better than their words. When we say Gore lost votes because he was sort of “wooden” and Kerry seems “a little wooden too” we are really saying that these Democrats just aren't up to snuff at all when it comes to that “being before knowing” and “primary communication” stuff. It’s especially galling to the cognitive that Reagan was a B movie actor before he got the part as President and W never rides a horse but is carrying an imaginary branding iron around with him as if he were not a Connecticut Yalie just pretending to be a country & western Texan. Clinton really was white trash as a kid, Gore did have some roots in hillbilly Tennessee but sincere “primary communication” phoniness will beat phoney “secondary communication” sincerity every time. We notice that Bush is not very good at verbal, the literate snobs heap scorn on the poor guy, drop a few *bon mots* about his *malaprops* as if speaking some froggie talk will put him in his place. We laugh, but it’s a waste of time, convinces Bush supporters that W is genuine and that the liberal intellectuals are spurious. But if both candidates were really good at “being before knowing” and “primary communication” the 100 million who could vote but don’t might all be voting with a passion.

Life before lifestyle!

Being before knowing!
Primary before secondary communication. .
Primary communication for primary education in primary schools.

Pat Campbell:

The Swiss pedagogue, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827), used the word *anschauung* to describe a concept akin to being before knowing. He was revolutionary in breaking from his 18th century eye-directed world of the Enlightenment and into the possibilities for sense intuition, or learning through the senses. His *anschauung* was influential in the schools of Europe, and was undeniably the basis of Lowell Mason's approach to music education in the 1830s. "Sound before symbol" is the teachers' translation of Pestalozzian method, where experience is seen as the gateway to conceptual understanding. Applications of this *anschauung* in music are based upon the logic of "sound before sight" and "practice before theory". Active listening experiences, singing, dancing, playing, and creating are all essential ways of children's music learning, each of them foundational to an understanding of written notes and music theory that may follow.

- Watch the teaching and learning transactions in a class of music for children. Whether it's called Orff, Kodaly, Dalcroze, Gordon, or something else, it becomes effective when children are being before knowing, listening and doing before the words and symbols come forward. With a good teacher as facilitator of learning, the talk is limited and the experiences are at the core of any lesson.
- For a look at classic Pestalozzian principles, read Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi's book, How Gertrude Teachers her Children: An Attempt to Help Mothers to Teacher Their Own Children and An Account of the Method (published in English translation by Lucy E. Holland Frances C. Turner, London: Quantum Reprints, 1966).