

The wisdom of our bodies – there’s knowledge in the muscle



By Judith DeLozier and Judith Lowe

Have you ever danced your worries away? Have you ever intuitively sensed that certain kinds of movements, breathing patterns and body rhythms have helped to change your mood and your perspective?

Movement is so simple and straightforward, isn’t it? Our human bodies are built to run and jump and gesture and touch and hold.

And of course movement regulates our overall physiology and wellbeing; everything from circulation to digestion to metabolism to immunity.

And movement also helps us to integrate our new ideas and new experiences, and primes our most creative thinking. It’s the genius pattern.

NLP and movement – shall we dance?

Physicality, movement and expressive dance have not always played much of a major role in NLP! Although we have a keen focus on observing, calibrating and producing many types of non-verbal communication, there’s also the meta model and a lot of language patterns to learn. There are quite a lot of NLP techniques to practise too.

And of course there’s the life-changing ‘mind shift’ that happens when we take on board the core NLP presuppositions. Really? A ‘*positive intention*’? The meaning of my communication is *what* now? How come there are different *maps* of the world? What even *is* a map?!

So sometimes we can get all up in our heads, trying to follow the process, and then perhaps we’re not so attuned to what’s going on in the rest of the system where we live and breathe in the present moment.

However it turns out that we really do have bodies too, as well as minds. And that our bodies have quite a lot to say.

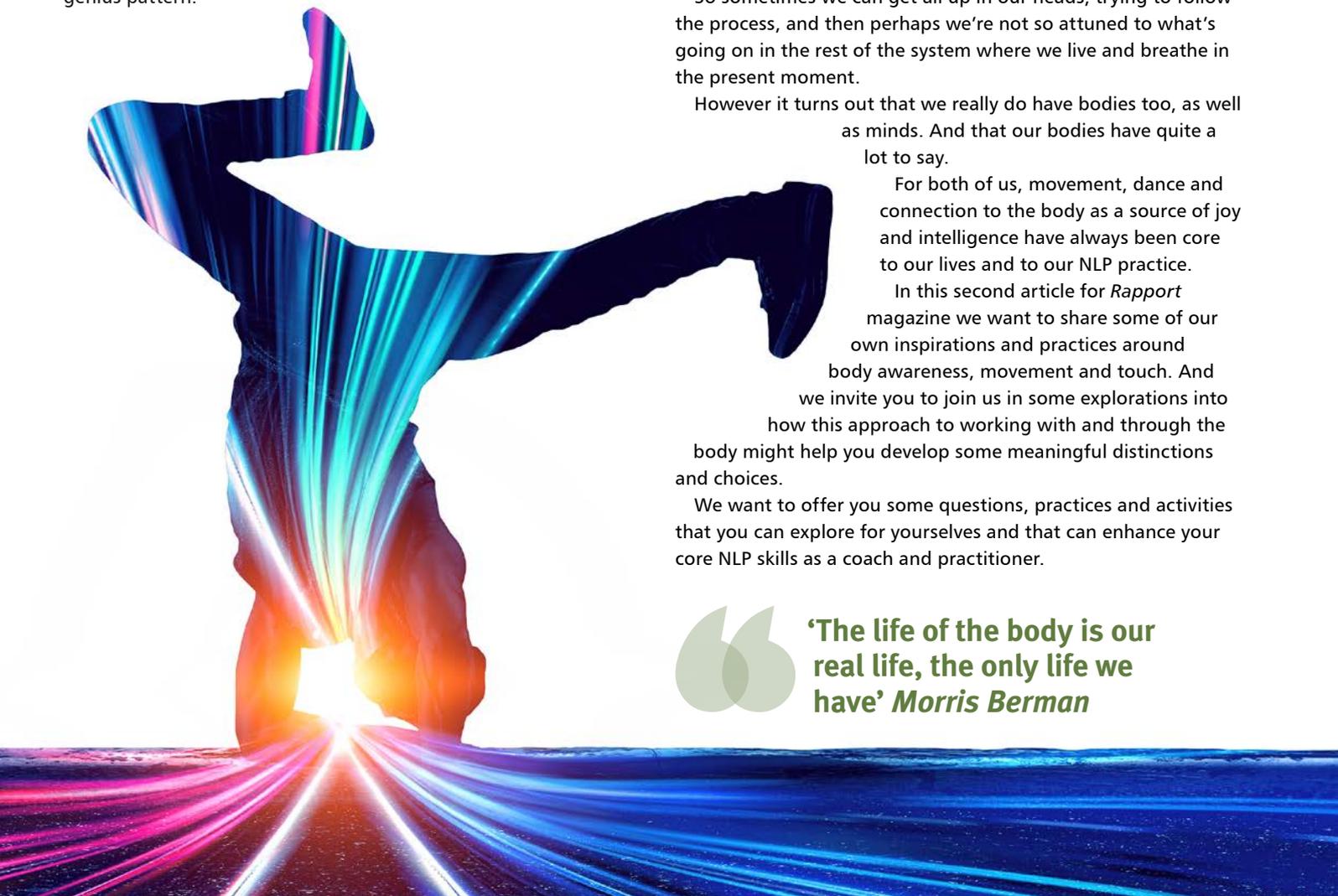
For both of us, movement, dance and connection to the body as a source of joy and intelligence have always been core to our lives and to our NLP practice.

In this second article for *Rapport* magazine we want to share some of our own inspirations and practices around body awareness, movement and touch. And we invite you to join us in some explorations into how this approach to working with and through the body might help you develop some meaningful distinctions and choices.

We want to offer you some questions, practices and activities that you can explore for yourselves and that can enhance your core NLP skills as a coach and practitioner.



‘The life of the body is our real life, the only life we have’ *Morris Berman*



Maybe being more in touch with our bodies can help us love and heal and honour our bodies more. And yes, we might even one day get to dance like nobody's watching! Or at least fall back in love with our bodies and ourselves, and each other, and our lives.

The 'somatic mind' is the mind within your body

Soma is the Greek word for body. When we are in touch with our bodies and aware of our physical aliveness we have more access to what is called our 'somatic mind'. This experience of being more in touch and attuned with our bodies is sometimes described as a kind of *mindfulness* of the body, *mindfulness* of breathing and *mindfulness* of movement.

Being in touch with our bodies like this is also a kind of foundational intelligence for us. It's our mammal mind. We are alive and present in the here and now. Here we are. We inhabit our bodies. We are anchored in this present moment. There's a natural liveliness and vitality to all our thoughts and actions.

We have this subjective 'felt sense' of our body that is like a purely physical awareness of our whole ongoing life process. We can pay attention to our inner sensations and we can learn how to invite these other parts of our nervous system to reveal their information in ways that we can hear.

We actually even have a physical heart-mind and a belly-mind, both of which contain neurons and have complex intrinsic nervous systems that operate independently from the head-mind. We know our hearts can take us along a life path, and our gut feelings often help us to make our best decisions.

So rather than seeking solutions to our problems purely from the cognitive mind maybe we can connect with, work with, and truly speak from that subtle, underlying felt sense of life, held within our greater nervous system.

The body as a representational system – somatic intelligence

In NLP we work with the idea that human beings have five basic senses and that information and experience is somehow processed and managed by these sensory systems. We use our senses in complex ways to represent our world and to create our 'maps' of situations and relationships, both literally and figuratively.

We know we can use our bodies to make models of the world too. We can express movements that are the literal response to a particular situation, or create expressions that are more metaphorical, as through dance and mime.

Our bodies unconsciously move and gesture and 'dance'. Our bodies are processing for us and with us, telling us something, expressing something, and knowing something that we can't put into words. Our bodies are a great source of intelligence to us.

So how can we further awaken our 'somatic intelligence'?

'If I could say it I wouldn't have to dance it.'

Isadora Duncan

Embodied knowledge is sometimes known as tacit knowledge. We sometimes say we know more than we can tell. In NLP this kind of learning is at the very core of our practice – the modelling of expert performance.

Our most basic way of learning is through deep and often unconscious imitation of others. This is how we learnt as babies and as small children. We now know we even have specialised nerve cells called mirror neurons that do this job for us and



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activate our motor systems when we deeply connect to what another person is doing.

In NLP we learn to engage this process in building and maintaining rapport with someone through deliberate, subtle, matching and mirroring of their out-of-conscious-awareness expressions of posture, gestures, facial expressions and key tonalities and words. We get into their rhythm and join them in their dance.

It brings information into our bodies, another world, news of difference. We need to dance it to know it.

Then you're a mile away and you've got their shoes

Judith DeLozier learns about a culture through movement first. How do people in this culture move through the world? How do they hold themselves? Is there a special rhythm to the way they walk? How loose or how tight is the stride? How open or constrained is the torso? How is the head balancing on the body? How deep or shallow is the breathing? How are the arms and hands coordinating?

Then she starts to sense where people systematically place their attention in this culture. What seems to draw the gaze, the turn of the head, the focus of the eyes? In other words, what's important? What are people filtering for? What is visible to them? What's going on in their world?

Her intention is to allow her body to fall into sync with the people around her, to use her body to absorb information in a natural way, without evaluation and judgment. She's building tacit knowledge and understanding, empathy even. She's entering a reality that's patterned and organised differently to hers and bringing it into herself, into her own body.

You may have done an activity like this early in your NLP training – *Walking in someone else's shoes*. It's an everyday expression that means we want to understand someone else's

- ▶ experience, see things through their eyes, feel something of what's happening for them, their perspective, and what a situation or issue means to them. Here we take it literally. Don't judge someone until you've walked a mile in their shoes. Literally go for a walk.

Acting, smiling at babies, and looking at the moon

Many actors work like this too. Part of their process is to inhabit the movement of the character and find the essential postures, rhythms and stride. They allow the feeling and the nuances of their performance and the inner life of the person to be expressed and emerge naturally from the way the body is held and moves. You could even say they are talking the walk.

The way someone moves is like their signature, unique and personal. Sophisticated movement-analysis software is



We can use our bodies to make models of the world

currently being developed as a way to identify potential criminal suspects. Frame-by-frame analysis of exceptional sportspeople allows us to see something of the magic of their mastery and artistry. Watching Simone Biles in her World Championship and Olympic title routines in slo-mo is an example of the wondrous beauty of the human body in motion and of her artistic control and supreme somatic intelligence.

News of difference teaches us about ourselves. We get to learn more about our own personal habitual movements and filters on the world. We find out something about human possibility. The other person is quicker, more focused than us. They have a kind of staccato pace, and maybe we are more languorous and easy. This is a difference that makes a difference.

Maybe they notice motorbikes and we don't. They don't smile at babies and we do. And then I'm looking around for the restaurant and you're looking at the beautiful moon.

So what's somatic syntax?

There is a relationship between the deep structure of our experience and the surface structure of our movement. This is

like the metaphor we use from transformational grammar in the NLP meta model about the relationship between spoken language (surface structure) and experience (deep structure).

Language has a structure called syntax. The word 'syntax' means to put in order or arrange. In language when the syntax is changed it changes the meaning of the communication. The mat sat on the cat.

This is also true of somatic syntax. There is an order and an underlying structure to physical movement, and when that changes you can sense the changes in the meaning of an experience, as well as changes in your emotional state. So somatic syntax is literally 'body language'. It's the speech and wisdom of the body, the brain in our body, our own mind-body-spirit, speaking to us, and through us.

A practical experiment – step in, move, play, change, integrate

'All that is important is this one moment in movement. Make the moment important, vital, and worth living. Do not let it slip away unnoticed and unused.'

Martha Graham

Here's a practical experiment for you in the form of an activity designed by Judith DeLozier and Robert Dilts (adapted from *NLP II: the next generation*).

This activity is in two parts. In the first part you identify some patterns of movement that are associated with a resourceful internal state. In particular you're invited to become more aware of the kind of physical patterns that either enhance or diminish the resourcefulness of the state. In the second part you can explore how best to incorporate those patterns that enhance the state into your everyday actions and behaviours.

1. Getting a positive resource state 'in the muscle' – experiential activity

What positive, resourceful state would you like more of in your life? Would you like to be more confident? Would you like to be more creative? Would you like to be more centred and grounded?

Discover how you can most fully step into that positive resource state. Maybe you'll have a strong memory of a time you felt like this? Maybe you can strongly imagine what it feels like?

As you step into the whole-body, present-moment feeling of this positive state, pay attention to any spontaneous physical movements, that for you are a natural way of expressing and deeply feeling this resource state.

Notice your body posture, any movements, any gestures, breathing patterns, etc.

Now you can start to play with the 'somatic syntax' of this resource state. You can explore the 'deep structure' of these physical expressions by changing the 'surface structure' of different aspects of them.

- Can you change the quality of the movement?
- Can you change the speed and rhythm?
- Can you change the parts of the body involved?
- Can you change the sequence and order?
- Can you change the direction?
- Which of these changes *intensifies* and makes *more* of the resource state?

Which of these changes actually *change* this state to a different state?

2. Taking this resource state into everyday life – experiential activity

This second part of the experiment helps you transfer the positive resource state from the first exercise into the actions and activities of everyday life.

Firstly, choose three everyday actions or behaviours that you do frequently. You could choose walking, or carrying something, or sitting, or cooking.

Now create the very best version of the positive resource state you have been exploring in the previous exercise.

Begin one of your chosen actions (walking, sitting etc.) and adapt the physical expression of the positive resource state to blend and fit with that activity in a way that is most natural. Check that the way you do this also preserves the full experience and strength of the positive resource state. What difference does this make? What else can you do with these ideas and possibilities?

Healing and releasing a ‘stuck state’

This is just one of many ‘somatic syntax’ activities you can play around with and adapt. If you are already moving in a state that is useful and resourceful you can bring awareness to those movements in a similar way. Also you can experiment with a ‘stuck state’ in this way.

(JDL) *‘I love the way Moshe Feldenkrais thought of a “stuck state”. He went directly to the body and held the question, “What movement is the body trying to complete?” The body is in a “vegetative state”. A state of non-movement. From the point of view of somatic syntax if we begin to bring awareness to the movement we can bring awareness to where the movement stops and also allow for the completion.’*

This kind of thinking is now central to many mind–body contemporary approaches to PTSD. Allowing the body to tremble and shake, to move more freely to complete the rigidified moment of shock and freeze, seems to have some healing benefits in releasing the tensions of the ‘held’ experience. In NLP meta-model speak it’s also like a kind of de-nominalisation of the body, getting things moving again in a sympathetic and skillful way.

I could have danced (NLP) all night

Of course there are many NLP models that can be enriched by movement and by physicalising the whole coaching space. The *perceptual positions* model – in which you occupy the perspectives of yourself, another person (or persons), plus an ‘observer’ position – can be laid out on the floor and the appropriate physiologies can be stepped into for a deeper understanding and effect.

Similarly we often walk our *timelines*, literally laid out on the floor. We’re able to step on and off, in and through time. We’re able to get to the end and turn and look back at ourselves. We can even offer ourselves gifts and blessings, offering and stepping in, and accepting. There’s something about physically moving in these structured coaching spaces that allows for more of ourselves to get engaged in this deep process of learning and change.

Other familiar NLP models which can be coached like this include the *logical level alignment* process, the *Disney creativity* model, and the *SCORE* model. You can even literally *dance* the SCORE!

Stepping in and out of problem and solution spaces, expressively moving limiting beliefs into a space of doubt and then into a space of openness to new beliefs, shifting states along a stepping-stones pathway to resourcefulness – all these learning activities are enhanced by movement and physicality.

You can even use your body to choreograph the NLP meta model and to play ‘Guess the NLP meta programme.’

Because there ain’t no party like an NLP party.

Bringing joy into the moment– new coding NLP

So here is Judith DeLozier recalling her thoughts and her personal experimentation as she created, with John Grinder, the *Walking edit*. It’s one of the new code NLP practices to help people become more congruent, integrated and wise in their approaches to personal growth and evolution.

She describes a kind of ‘Aha!’ creative moment when she realises that you can *move* in a resource state and that movement itself profoundly enriches the experience. Here she brings dance into the NLP classroom.

‘The walking edit was the first time I remember bringing movement into the process. Meaning that before it was more the static calibration of elements of a state. The edit involved walking in a non-resourceful state and noticing the elements and then walking in a more aligned state and then contrasting and noticing the elements of difference between the two states. The person was then asked to exaggerate some portion of the non-resourceful state...really exaggerate it! Then allow the body to come to a new homeostasis.

‘The use of African dance in the new coding was from my perspective to give the participants a time to move, integrate and actually bring some joy into the moment. It also allowed for the harvesting of ideas generated through doing a set of movements that were not quite usual in our everyday lives. This stretch of the body released many great possibilities that fed the group as a field and brought awareness to the individuals.’

Encountering non-habitual movements like this and bringing them into your own body allows for a kind of somatic ‘re-think’ of how you are organising yourself. Our physical postural habits define deep aspects of our experience. ►

The way someone moves is like their signature, unique and personal





The skilful touch of a teacher or friend helps to bring awareness, release and integration to the whole way we stand and move

► Poise and presence – sitting and standing – the use of the self

We get so used to ourselves that this kind of profound engagement with difference, with 'not me', can feel weird and uncomfortable. Our everyday movements just feel right, don't they? It's just normal to walk like this and gesture like this.

Judith Lowe is an ongoing student of the Alexander Technique. She makes it sound exciting by saying that after thirty-plus years of lessons she nearly knows how to get in and out of a chair. This is because Alexander lessons focus on very simple everyday movements like sitting and standing and taking a step forwards. The goal is to be able to direct more consciously your own psychophysical activity, and to be in a position to choose the way you function in your moment-to-moment, living, breathing mind-body. This is in contrast with letting our habits just unconsciously run us, outside our awareness.

It's another mindful, conscious approach to being with ourselves in new ways and tracking in detail the overall state of our being. Robert Dilts in his leadership work talks about the high-value performance states of 'relaxed readiness' and 'focused spaciousness'. Working with the Alexander Technique helps you to calibrate to these types of states.

The Alexander Technique is about what's called 'the use of the self.' It's about training your awareness and applying certain key principles around how you are moving in all the daily activities of your life. It's founded in ideas about the unity of mind and body, the functioning of sensory perception, and the awakening to the awareness of our choices at every moment. This effects how we respond to our situation – physically and emotionally.

Feedback and learning through touch

There are no exercises, just the guiding hands of your teacher. This feedback of the teacher's touch is somatic, through the body. You get feedback on your degree of coordination in a moment-to-moment way. You learn about the interferences you are running, your contractions, gripping and tensing. You are made aware of your own habitual patterns and you learn how to inhibit and free yourself from your usual responses. You can inhibit and transform a particular reaction to a given stimulus.

Your body is like a map that over time has settled into its own ways, its own survival programmes and stimulus-response patterns. This subtle, somatic way of working relates to the idea of NLP anchors and to 'stuck states'. Our resources and creativity are sometimes held in a kind of 'neuro-muscular lock'. This tension feels normal to us as it's what we know.

Our posture reflects our inner state. The skilful touch of a teacher or friend helps to bring awareness, release and integration to the whole way we stand and move. It puts us in touch with our potential, with what might be possible.

Get up! stand up! stand up for your rights!

Bob Marley

The Alexander Technique focuses particularly on the subtle relationships and coordinating movements of the head, neck

and shoulders, and spine. It's always hard to explain what really happens in a lesson, but here's a simple experiential activity, lightly based on the idea of helping another person to have an experience of this kind of body awareness.

Bringing awareness to the neck, shoulders and posture – experiential activity

In pairs, both people stand or sit. Begin to tune into your body – move your attention around your body, from your feet to your legs, your belly, your chest, your back, your arms, your neck and shoulders, your face and head, etc. Tune in to your breathing. Make adjustments to the way you are sitting or standing as you notice where you are tense, or where you are asymmetrical, or not as upright and poised as you could be.

When both of you are in a more physically aware, awake and present state you can give yourselves these types of guidelines: *let my neck be free, my head forward and up, my shoulders can let go and relax, allow my spine to lengthen, my back to broaden and widen, let my weight be evenly balanced – and may I be breathing in a way that supports me to be upright in my length, and in a relaxed way, taking up my space in the world.*

Gently move and make any adjustments you want to in order to optimise this way of being in your body.

Now one of you gently let your hands rest on your partner's shoulders from behind them. There's no pushing or manipulating – just this gentle feedback through touch.

You can do this while your partner is thinking of a goal, or thinking of a problem.

Another thing you can do is gently take the weight of your partner's arm from the side, as they bend it and relax into your hands. You can do this in a sequence for both arms. Allowing the weight of the arm to be held like this often gives people the feedback they need to be able to let go in their shoulders. Sometimes people find they really have been holding up the world all day!

What's that like? What does it do for you? What does it make more possible?

The life of the body is our real life

It is a miracle to be alive. Our human bodies are a miracle. As Judith DeLozier says, 'Try living without one!'

So if I were a musician how would I take care of my instrument? If I have a dog or a horse will I feed and nurture them better than myself? Do I get the nourishing meals for others but not myself? Am I truly caring for myself?

Looking after, loving and caring for our bodies is about saying a big yes to life. It's about respecting our lives and taking pleasure in being alive. It's so amazing we are even here.

See you in May 2019 for the Passion in Action masterclass

We are so looking forward to meeting you in May 2019 at our Masterclass at the NLP International Conference. ●