

# Inspiring Engagement Through Pleasure in Movement

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[...] What struck with me was how these women really valued certain aspects of their experience; the grit, the hard work, the challenge, intensely visceral, strong, dangerous, the camaraderie, and the sense of purpose. Struggling, sweating, striving – being together – the buzz, the joy, the thrill, the satisfaction!

These words feature in Marianne Davies' recent written reflections on a paper recently reviewed by herself (UKCoaching, Dynamics-Coaching), Stuart Armstrong (Sport England) and Tyler Yearby (Emergence) in a conversation now released as part of the The Talent Equation "Book Club" series of podcasts. Her words get to the heart of something quite refreshingly engaging about some of Karen Lambert's recent work on pathways to finding pleasure in movement.

In this piece, I pick out key arguments being presented by Karen Lambert - and pose questions about what these might mean for those of us seeking to have an impact on the landscape of coach development. That involves engagement with embodied learning, but opens onto questions we currently see being posed with renewed force as practitioners take time out to reflect on what impact they might like to have beyond the current Covid-19 crises.



## Why we love to move....

Under "triggering embodied memories" the author starts with a poem - asking "why we love to move" - and if we've felt it...

bodily sensations, emotions, feelings, thoughts, memories  
lingering on/in your body  
returning to that space when  
you recall this or that time when  
you were 'in' the movement moment  
in the game, backyard or bush,  
at the park, gym or playground,  
on the track, wave or bike when you were  
bodily sensations, petrified, thrilled, exhilarated, buzzing.

Lambert builds on an earlier paper which suggests "meaning/sense making (learning) is a pleasurable embodied act with educative potential" - and here she suggests "reflection reminds us that our movement stories and experiences linger on/in our bodies [...] and this helps us to make sense of our-selves, our-bodies, others, and places [...] forging our values, attitudes and actions, informing our lifelong movement patterns as well as our pedagogical choices."

The actual study is of "fire-fighting camps for girls" - so gets to movement outside of formal sport - and the focus is on how "meaning/sense making (learning) is a pleasurable embodied act with educative potential" - on revealing "the pleasures that have resonated in us and might likewise echo in others."

Her challenge ratchets up with the idea that "we may not have to physically move to be moved by movement, to learn to move or to learn from movement" - and the heart of the challenge Lambert poses is captured here:

It seems logical to assume that an embodied pedagogy in PE likely needs to be able to both evoke learning/meaning without moving, to captivate, build curiosity, charm, inspire, as well as evoke learning/meaning within movement – to engage, entrench, embed, fortify.

I use this assumption as the basis of this paper by suggesting that young women can be, and likely might need to be, activated to move prior to moving, and that scaffolding such a process has the potential to create a safe, supportive and curious environment for teaching and learning about pleasures ‘in’ movement.

This approach may be particularly helpful for young women who may not have ever experienced the kinds of expansive, sustained or repeated pleasures of embodied movement connection suggested above. I base this on the hunch below recorded in my fieldwork notes.

We’re also given a thought from Lambert’s field notes: that "most girls are not given (nor are they encouraged to have or seek out) intensely visceral, hard, strong, dangerous, complex, rough play and somewhat painful movement experiences when they are young – hence they don’t know what it’s like to stretch, challenge, hurt and live their moving bodies in the world, making anything brought to them in physical education outside their realm of embodied possibilities."



## **Implications for Coach Development**

The challenge from Lambert is simply enough stated: can we facilitate powerful, sensory, pleasurable and safe feelings/senses of movement in ways which increase the chance of those affected engaging further? Her focus is embodied pedagogies in physical education - but what might all of this mean for those of us who are dedicated to making a difference within the broader landscape of coach development?

Lambert’s paper explores diverse vignettes which each implicate pleasure as an antecedent to embodied learning - vignettes of what movement looks, feels, smells, sounds and tastes like. Because of the context, these mention "passion for heavy tools, mangled vehicles, saving lives, heat, complex thinking, physicality, bodily excretions, looking after each other, and solving problems" - but that’s because the focus was on fire fighting.

Should our coach development landscape encourage exploration of pre-text? Of what that might mean within unique sporting domains? Of pre-text which might “engage, motivate, inspire, prompt, move, set a scene, build emotion, and in some way create a state of readiness or activation (to act, move, do, be)”? How might that look for sporting contexts as different as (say) ice-hockey, rowing, horse-riding, parkour and skateboarding?

Lambert’s thrust is "critiquing taken-for-granted assumptions, and enabling persistence" and of "the lifelong and lifewide valuing of movement" - but by looking at how "pre-text provides opportunities to explore imaginary worlds, characters, contexts and situations." For our social learning space, that’s opening up the potential value of working with drama notions which may previously have been marginal to us.

## **The Pleasure of Movement & Getting Active in the Outdoors**

For once, we have a study which suggests ways of coaches engaging which get beyond the shallower notions of “fun” which have dominated National Governing Body messages about participation for so long. It also gets us beyond the “instrumental outcomes” focus of those who seek to use outdoor adventurous activities (effectively or otherwise) as a means to facilitate “personal development.”

One possible starting point with this is Marianne Davies' reflections on conversations with Aled Lloyd Williams (Rodeo or Freestyle Kayaker) and Johnny Dawes (rock climbing). Her pre-text talks of her awe at the "grace" with which Aled would carve and spin on waves and of Johnny's "exquisite understanding and awareness of the dimensions of time and space, pressure and feel."

Marianne's conversation with Aled showcased his surrounding environment as "a four-dimensional movie of movement opportunities" - conveying richness. Her conversations with Johnny took her far further: into "the musicality of the movements" - which he could even hum. Unsurprisingly, the passage ends with talk of having found something "utterly fascinating" about what movement meant to each of them.

## **Linking to Serious Savouring**

Lambert's work is looking at entry points into a lifetime of activity - but it perhaps takes on added significance when paired with *Moments like diamonds in space: savoring the ageing process through positive engagement with adventure sports* (Hickman et al, 2016) - which is written from a Serious Leisure Perspective. This discusses the significance of belonging to sense-making communities of climbers and sea kayakers. Crucially, it touches on how these activities can assume a central, long-term and stabilizing role in our lives.

Can we link Lambert's work to a study of how engaging with adventure as "serious leisure" may become a means of fully expressing our identities through a chosen medium of adventure? Can we see a start made with pre-texts leading, through time, to an engagement with "hard adventure" experiences and eventually on to a situation where "layers of savoring laid down over time can prove the bedrock to withstand negative life events" - and perhaps to an enhanced capacity to manage health-related adversity?

For those of us whose domain is the outdoors, engagement through pre-text almost certainly has possibilities - but does that relevance end with initial engagement? We're almost all conscious of the transformation in outlook which is necessary for a newcomer (young or older) to go from participating in outdoor sport in a transactional manner (typically short term) to becoming someone who "gets" the outdoors. Engagement might be seen as having nested levels: can pre-text help at each one?



## **Where does this leave Coach Development?**

Much of my own recent work has been around the role of NGBs, coach developers, coaches, clubs and others in shaping a landscape of affordances which sustains pathways into the outdoors. My instinct is that those who seek to make a difference through Lambert's work perhaps need to engage beyond those who formally identify as (and may be trained and qualified as) coaches. Appropriate use of pre-text may have legs - but if we're really going to have a transformational impact, we may have to work with parents as partners, and with wider networks, on ways to ensure entire domains of engagement are infused with such pre-text.

## **References**

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