

## **Somatics – the body experienced from within.**

Somatics is an umbrella term for many practices and approaches including the two practices that inform the teaching and learning approach of tSOEL: Body-mind Centering® and Elsa Gindlers work. Somatics was first coined as a term by the late Thomas Hanna in a two part article published in the late 1980's called "What is Somatics". Below is an abridged version of another text by Hanna defining Somatics.

SOMATIC EDUCATION is the use of sensory-motor learning to gain greater voluntary control of ones physiological process. It is "somatic" in the sense that the learning occurs within the individual as an internalized process. In its purity, somatic education is self-initiated and self-controlled. However, somatic education has emerged during the twentieth century as a procedure whereby this internalized learning process is initiated by a teacher who stimulates and guides the learner through a sensory-motor process of physiological change.

Prior to the advent of this teacher-learner form of somatic education, the same self-transformatory events have been a commonplace of human history. "Miraculous" cures and healings have always occurred. Extraordinary transformations of the body -- supernormal strength, radical changes in physical skills, stigmata appearing on the body -- are the common lore of martial, athletic, and religious history.

Before the twentieth century the closest approximation to teacher-learner somatic education was the work of shamans and Asian healers who helped initiate the sensory-motor learning process by means of symbolic manipulations and movements that evoked powerful physiological transformation in their "patients", healing them in extraordinary ways. Because the mechanisms of such healings are hidden within the internal process of individuals, they have always had the aura of mysteries -- a mythology of good and bad spirits or good and bad energies accounted for this hidden process. It is this same hiddenness that causes the work of twentieth-century somatic educators to appear to be "miraculous" in the same mysterious way that the prescientific world viewed shamanistic work.

It is our task to achieve an understanding of the somatic realm in general -- and of somatic education in particular -- so that the mystery and the mythology will be dispelled. In this way, somatic education can become a discipline available to all humans. The salutary results of self-teaching, self-learning, self-healing, and self-regulation should

not be understood as "miraculous," but as *somatic*: they are genetically-given capacities intrinsic to all human beings.

By Thomas Hanna from the article "Clinical Somatic Education. A New Discipline in the Field of Health Care" [www.hannasomatics.com](http://www.hannasomatics.com) accessed 27<sup>th</sup> January 2010.