

Personal Reflection – September 24, 2021

One Small Step at a Time - A Lesson from my Physical Therapist

At ninety, old bones speak loud: “I’m tired, I’m weary, I’m creaky and likely to cramp!” I respond with a sigh and sit in my lounge chair with my feet up! That sitting makes the old bones sadder. “Move us!” they ask, hoping I won’t. I don’t, and sit some more, until the fatigue, creakiness and cramp get me into the care of a brilliant young Physical Therapist, Kelli C. DPT. And, I learn! Oh! How much I learn from working with Kelli!

She knows exactly what she is doing to strengthen legs that sat out the Great Covid Quiet from March 2020 ‘til almost today. I did not swim. I did not walk anywhere! Now, there is hope: I walk ten minutes a day with my walker in front of my house; I swim a good hour twice a week, I meet Kelli for a gruelling hour-long session twice a week and do a set of similar actions at home daily.

The lesson I am learning that I want to share with you is, of course, about *learning*.

Kelli has me doing very small, simple movements, repeating each one twenty or forty times. I see the *smallness* as significant, and the *repetition* as even more significant to what we do in Dialogue Education. I said once, and it was not well-received: “*You cannot teach too little. You cannot go too slow!*”

I also once said: “There are three things that make this system work: time, time and time, in that order!”

I work with Kelli for an hour, doing small, tough movements, in endless repetition. She tells me what to do, when to take a break to breathe deeply, offers me a cool drink of water and incessant encouragement. “Good work, Jane, that is a tough movement. You did it well.” *Affirmation! Engagement!* And, I continue.

Each set of movements is a learning task...both for me and for my creaky bones. The tasks have a clear *sequence*, as step by small step we move towards strength and agility. I said to Kelli today, as I finished an hour with her: “I am amazed at the power of small steps. I feel the actions I do affect my whole body, not just my legs. You make me attend to each cell in my body with such small steps.”

Kelli smiled, “Exactly!”

--Jane Vella