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Sensing and Shaping from Within: Exploring the Integration of Somatic Concepts into the Teaching and Learning of Ballet

THESIS

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Sensing and Shaping from Within: Exploring the Integration of Somatic Concepts into the Teaching and Learning of Ballet

By

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Professor Loretta Livingston, Chair

This thesis research study examines how somatic thought can aid in the approach to, and execution of, classical ballet, specifically within American dance programs in higher education at the undergraduate level. This research also aims to further the discussion of the value of using somatics in training dance professionals. It adds to an existing body of knowledge of more helpful and healthy pedagogical ways in shaping dancers by treating the individual body and striving for wellness.

A brief overview of three long standing somatic practices, The Alexander Technique, Laban Movement Analysis/Bartenieff Fundamentals, and Ideokinesis, provides background on foundations and principles: teaching awareness of self, placing attention on mind-body connectivity, and promoting efficiency in motion, breath, and body alignment. Also, a closer look at two examples of long-standing, high achieving BFA dance conservatory programs, The Juilliard School and The Boston Conservatory, demonstrate the utility of somatics in dance curricula.

Lastly, this thesis research describes the workshop I undertook with undergraduate dance students at the University of California, Irvine exploring the application of somatic concepts to classical ballet. The pedagogical model was based on four somatic principles: breath, kinesthesia

(internal sensing), connectivity, and initiation and intention, drawn from *Dance and Somatics: Mind-Body Principles of Teaching and Performance*, by Julie Brodie and Elin Lobel. Additionally, experiential anatomy was incorporated into the workshop through the work of Mabel Todd, Lulu Sweigard, and Irene Dowd. Emergent themes included a sense of community building amongst students, as well as empowerment within each as individual artists.

CHAPTER ONE

From Balanchine to Bartenieff: My Path Incorporating Somatic Thought into Ballet

Beginnings

Whether learning first dance steps as a young child or new choreography as a professional dancer, the genre of dance known as "ballet" is traditionally learned through a process of observation and physical practice. Instructors and choreographers provide dancers with exercises and movements by means of verbal direction and physical demonstration. The dancers then practice these movements repeatedly until deemed satisfactory. George Balanchine, one of the foremost choreographers in 20th century ballet, was said to have encouraged his dancers with simply "Just do, dear" (Grieg *xii*). Having been coached and taught by Balanchine ballerina Patricia McBride for much of my formative training, everything I learned was based on matching her shapes, following her musicality, and mimicking her movement until it became ingrained as my own. In my six years of training with Patti—as we fondly called her—I learned to perform the rhythmic nuances, the stylized *épaulement* (use of shoulders, head, and neck) and overall "Balanchine quality" more and more naturally. I also learned, however, that my particular body posed difficulties.

Classical ballet technique is physically demanding, built upon complex and specific anatomical structuring of the body. Though I had a great amount of flexibility, strong pliable feet, and fluid coordination, I lacked the long and lithe physique of the ideal "ballet body" as well as the necessary external rotation from the hips or "turnout"—both fundamentals in ballet technique. As a young teenager, mimicry could only take me so far, and I yearned to understand how I could become more successful with particular ballet vocabulary. It was difficult for Patti to

explain something that came so natural to her. She never had to think about how to return to fifth position from *tendu* or find more "turnout" in a jump. As a determined young lady, I began to focus on how things worked. I wanted to discover how I could achieve this genre of movement vocabulary with a body so clearly different from my teacher.

It wasn't until later in my training at age sixteen, with ballet teachers Rebecca Massey Wiley and Summer Rhatigan, that I experienced instruction with an intuitively anatomical and "somatic," or self-sensing, approach. Both teachers danced professionally—Rebecca with American Ballet Theater, and Summer with the National Ballet of Canada and LINES Ballet. Both also have established their own successful conservatories—Piedmont School of Music and Dance, and San Francisco Conservatory of Dance, respectively. Like Patti, they both were born with the anatomical structure for the ideal "ballet body" and "natural" facilities for the art form. However, different from Patti, Rebecca and Summer are able to explain the *process* to get to the product by exploring, understanding, and articulating the mechanics, details, and pathways to make each movement successful. Having encountered each of them at times in my life when I questioned the art form of ballet and my abilities within it, their information could not have been more welcomed. By taking the time to go slowly and look closer at a movement's pathway in the body, they explain ballet vocabulary step by step. They always provide multiple ideas as options to consider, instead of only asking students to demonstrate what they showed. Both Rebecca and Summer encouraged me to use my internal sensing of how a movement *felt* to understand it better.

Later still, at age eighteen, when I entered a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts dance conservatory program at New York University, I was introduced to various lineages of "somatic techniques" in my modern dance classes. By "somatic techniques" I am referring to bodily

practices that teach awareness of self, place attention on mind-body connectivity, and promote efficiency in motion, breath, and body alignment (Eddy 6). Examples of codified somatic techniques currently incorporated into some dance training programs include, but are not limited to, The Alexander Technique, Laban Movement Analysis/Bartenieff Fundamentals, Ideokinesis, Body-Mind Centering, and The Feldenkrais Method (a few of which I will go into greater detail in chapter two).

My modern dance classes at NYU taught by Gerald Casel, currently a Professor of Dance at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and former dancer with the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company and Stephen Petronio Company, peaked my interest in understanding how my body works. Through Gerald's sincere interest and knowledge of anatomy and somatic practices, specifically the work of Mabel Todd, Lulu Sweigard, Susan Klein, and Irene Dowd, I learned fundamental concepts about the structure of my body and its kinesiology. I became aware of my own body's movement patterns, and practiced shedding habitual effort that did not serve me. Gerald imparted to me the importance of being clear in phrasing movement. Directing my (and my classmates') attention to the initiation and follow through of a movement's energy, he instilled within me a keen sense of awareness to where movements originate, as well as the intention of a movement's energetic quality. It was also in Gerald's classes I was first introduced to human developmental motor patterns that several somatic approaches utilize, including those by Irmgard Bartenieff, Peggy Hackney, and Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen. These patterns continue to inform my movement choices to this day. Not only did this newfound wealth of knowledge help me maintain a healthier dancing body and greatly influence my personal movement style, it also made me question and explore my pedagogical ideas about dance, specifically ballet. These inquiries have become my areas of interest and prompted my thesis research: to look more

closely at somatic techniques within dance training. This led me to create a thesis research project focused on exploring the incorporation of somatic ideas into the teaching of ballet.

Ballet Pedagogy: How We Teach and Learn, and Looking Forward

Historically, ballet is often considered one of the fundamental techniques in western dance training programs due to its long-standing tradition of training a dancer's alignment, strength, stamina, coordination, and control (Butterworth 18-19). One can find ballet classes across the United States in private recreational studios, pre-professional conservatories, as well as university settings. The manner in which ballet is taught can vary greatly, depending upon the instructor's own training, as well as the student learning outcomes he or she has outlined for the class.

Similar to many dancers' training experiences, my ballet teachers (Patti, Rebecca, and Summer) differed in their pedagogical methods and approaches. Whether an instructor was trained in various styles of ballet (such as Balanchine, or the Russian method founded by Agrippina Vaganova), had a professional career that included contemporary repertoire, or studied anatomy and kinesiology, each teacher chooses which concepts are most important to emphasize in class. Without greatly altering the structure of a ballet class or changing ballet vocabulary, I am curious whether infusing somatic ideas could enhance the student learning outcomes within a ballet class. As in my modern dance classes with Gerald, could the utilization of students' own internal sensing, in addition to direction from the instructor, serve as a tool to understanding *ballet* movements? Could this possibly stimulate a deeper intellectual process for both students and instructors in ballet classes?

Current studies in anatomy, kinesiology, biomechanics, psychology, and dance science inform human movement and our internal sensation of it in ways that did not exist when the first ballet academy was formed in the late 1600s, during the reign of King Louis XIV in France. Today, literature suggests alternative methods to aid in the teaching of ballet other than the traditional "instructor demonstrates, students perform." They include, but are not limited to, working without mirrors, the use of video and technology, using cuing based off human biomechanics, and incorporating concepts from modern dance (Warren 82; Grieg *xiii*; Paskevska 3). Teaching ballet with a somatic influence is yet another pedagogical approach in addition to those listed above. I chose to explore this specific focus because of my personal area of interest and experiences, as well as my desire to learn more about the somatics field.

Optimal Setting for Somatic Introductions?

It would appear to me that the optimal setting to introduce the use of somatic concepts into the teaching of ballet is within higher education. This opinion is deeply rooted in my own experience as a ballet student, professional, and teacher, as well as through this thesis research. Though introducing somatic concepts earlier might be ideal for a precocious student, it demands an understanding of technique and openness to listen to the body, most often found in more mature dancers. The willingness to investigate new ideas can exist in undergraduate dance students more readily when fostered by the department at large. For example, Cathy Young, Director of the Dance Division at The Boston Conservatory, a long-standing BFA dance conservatory program, has been implementing a greater somatic influence into the curriculum since she arrived four years ago. When speaking about the importance of somatics for dancers, Young stated,

> It is a really important part of [the students'] training…of how they think. When students have not been given the opportunity to trust their own internal sensing and perception, it takes them outside of themselves. There is a "disconnect" in their dancing, and although they might recognize it intuitively, they often can't articulate it. [Somatic based work] empowers them, and it allows them to trust their own perception and their own knowledge. Also, it gets them away from that critical self-assessment, towards a self-study that is a little bit less judgmental. (Young)

When speaking to Rebecca Paul, current third year student at Boston Conservatory, she reflected how she had never heard of somatics before college. Now, she can't imagine starting her day without it:

> Most dancers have a ritual to prepare themselves for what we do everyday because it is so repetitive. My somatics classes are almost like that. It feels natural for me to go in and do these movement [patterns], which have become really familiar to me. It prepares me emotionally and physically and gets me to a place where I'm ready to work. It readies me to be more efficient in ballet class…I believe I have been able to improve because I've had that mindset going into technique class. (Paul)

New York University's Tisch School of the Arts Dance Department, another example of a longstanding BFA dance conservatory program, states in their mission: "We seek to develop and prepare fully realized dance artists to be critical thinkers, fearless leaders, and fluent performers who understand their global responsibility and the transformative power of collaboration inherent in the expansive language of dance."[1] While technical proficiency is a large part of BFA dance programs, as a pedagogue, artist, and researcher, I support Tisch's statement that the overarching purpose should be nurturing individual thinkers that become the next generation of innovative dance artists. I consider integrating somatic principles into the teaching of ballet as one of many ways to help students at the higher education level achieve these goals—not only becoming more successful in accomplishing technical tasks, but also in

[1] As quoted on New York University's Tisch School of the Arts Department of Dance website http://dance.tisch.nyu.edu/page/home.html.

overlapping concepts between the multitude of styles they simultaneously learn, and ultimately, applying these ideas and practices into their daily lives, regardless of the path they choose.

As Professor of Dance and ballet master teacher Anna Paskevska noted in her book *Ballet Beyond Tradition*, "modern and ballet dancers are no longer on opposite sides of a tall fence. Somatics and idiokinetic techniques are recognized to be relevant to ballet, and a strong technical base is essential for all dancers" (*xi*). My hope would be that ballet classes within a BFA dance conservatory program offer to train more than alignment and strength, and are taught with varying approaches other than rote memorization and repetition. I propose ballet classes in higher education provide the opportunity to introduce new ideas and approaches to students, being afforded the time to dissect and explore concepts on a more intellectual level.

Thesis Research and Project

My thesis research began with the question I had as a young girl: how can I be successful in ballet with my individual body? After encountering many influential teachers both in the dance and mind-body practice realms, I acquired a wealth of knowledge and answers, which then led to more questions. This line of questioning became my areas of interest: anatomy and kinesiology, somatics and mind-body practices, the freedom and joy of movement, and how they all intersect.

My research is supported by a broad base of knowledge of somatic practices, the most prominent of which I will address in chapter two. I offer a brief, yet closer look, at three somatic techniques: The Alexander Technique, Laban Analysis/Bartenieff Fundamentals, and Ideokinesis. I chose to focus on methods that have withstood the test of time, as well as

influenced my own practice and teaching of ballet. For each, I have provided concise background information on the history, founder, fundamentals, and relationship to dance.

In chapter three, I explore the role of somatics in two examples of long-standing, high achieving BFA dance conservatory programs: the Juilliard School and the Boston Conservatory. My interest is in understanding how and why these programs include somatic methods in their curricula, and how connections are forged between somatic practices and dance technique classes. Data was gathered through personal interviews with current faculty members and students from both institutions. From Juilliard I interviewed Jane Kosminsky, Alexander Teacher and former dancer with the Paul Taylor Dance Company, and Blake Krapels, current senior BFA dance student. From Boston Conservatory, I interviewed Cathy Young, Director of the Dance Division, Shannon Lee Jones, Alexander Teacher and former Broadway performer, and Rebecca Paul, current junior BFA dance student.

This background knowledge in somatic methods and current dance programs led to my thesis research project, which I will discuss in chapters four and five. During a ten-session workshop, held over the course of eight weeks, I worked directly with thirteen current BFA dance students at the University of California, Irvine. My intended outcome for the students was to provide an introductory look into somatic principles and explore their own connections to ballet vocabulary. Overall, I aimed to learn which somatic concepts could successfully transfer into the teaching and learning of ballet.

In chapter four, I explain my pedagogical framework for the workshop. Intended to provide reference for chapter five, this chapter includes brief background information on the concepts covered in the workshop, influenced by the book *Dance and Somatics: Mind-Body Principles of Teaching and Performance* by Julie Brodie and Elin Lobel.

Observations and findings about the exercises utilized in the thesis research project are detailed in chapter five. I gathered data through personal field notes, intended and actual lesson plans, and students' discussions. Feedback from the students in the forms of written reflections and a final questionnaire were also collected.

Ultimately, themes emerged in addition to the somatic and ballet relationships, which I note in chapter six. These themes included personal empowerment within the students as individuals, and a sense of community amongst them as a cohort. Also, there was a need for additional time for students as well as myself to fully comprehend, workshop, and apply new somatic ideas into the learning, and teaching, of ballet.

CHAPTER TWO

Somatic Foundations

What are "somatics"?

The International Somatic Movement Education and Therapy Association states, "somatic movement describes movement that is sensed and shaped from within, rather than from an external source."[2] In the late 19th century, European artists and movement educators Francois Delsarte, Emile Jaques Dalcroze, and Bess Mensendieck, among others, paved the way for somatic pioneers by challenging the western philosophy of Cartesian dualism (that states a separation of body and mind) and exploring more "natural" approaches to physical training by emphasizing listening to the body (Batson 1; Eddy 10).

Somatic pioneers such as F.M. Alexander (1869-1955), Moshe Feldenkrais (1904-1984), and Mabel Todd (1880-1956) to name a few, were in search of ways to heal the body and move more efficiently (Eddy 6-7). Stimulated by personal injury and/or physical limitations, each pioneer investigated body mechanics through their own first person sensations by utilizing a strong mind-body connection (Eddy 12-13). The idea that active thought processes could create physical changes emerged as a theme throughout each somatic practice.

Though "somatic thought" began to be acknowledged in western cultures as early as the late nineteenth century, the field of somatics was not given its name until the 1970s by American philosopher and teacher Thomas Hanna (Eddy 6-7). Derived from the Greek word *soma* meaning "the living body in its wholeness," Hanna defined somatics as "the study of self from the perspective of one's lived experience, encompassing the dimensions of body, psyche, and spirit" (Hanna 5-6). He described *soma* as a "process… something changeable and supple, constantly

[2] As quoted on the International Somatic Movement Education and Therapy Association website, www.ismeta.org.

adapting to its environment" and distinguished *soma* from the word body, which to him suggested something static and solid (Hanna 6).

I decided to examine three somatic practices, the Alexander Technique, Laban Movement Analysis/Bartenieff Fundamentals, and Ideokinesis, due to their longstanding reputation in the field of somatics, as well as their utility and adoption into western dance training. I had personal experience with Bartenieff Fundamentals and Ideokinesis through my undergraduate dance program as well as Pilates training. Though I had never practiced the Alexander Technique, I learned of the many benefits in conceptual crossovers to dance technique through research and interviews with veteran Alexander practitioners currently working in BFA dance programs.

For the purposes of this thesis research, I chose not to include the bodily practices of Pilates and Yoga. Though both are rooted in the idea of maintaining a strong mind-body connection, the major distinction between these practices and somatic methods is "doing" versus "non-doing." What I mean by this is the component to Pilates and (western) Yoga that aims to physically train and strengthen musculature, seen in their respective codified movement exercises. As a certified Pilates instructor and avid yoga student for the past ten years, I find value in both methods. However, after interviews with somatic practitioners and my own research, I delineated they did not constitute as somatic methods for the scope of this research.

The Alexander Technique

After repeatedly losing his voice and receiving inconclusive results from doctors, Australian actor Frederick Mathias Alexander (1869-1955) set out on a determined journey of self-exploration (Nettl-Fiol and Vanier 19-20). His discoveries and insights, both in his own body and through teaching others, evolved into what we know today as the Alexander Technique

(Madden 13). Central Alexander principles are similar to many somatic practices, such as kinesthetic sensing and identifying habitual patterns of use. Other parallel concepts include the idea of unity of mind and body or what Alexander termed "psychophysical unity," as well as "means-whereby" or the heightened awareness to the process of change (Batson 4; Nettl-Fiol and Vanier 23-24). As stated in *Dance and the Alexander Technique: Exploring the Missing Link,* authors Rebecca Nettl-Fiol and Luc Vanier, both Alexander practitioners and instructors of modern and ballet respectively, state the importance of attention to "means-whereby" especially for dancers:

> This philosophical viewpoint [of focusing on the process rather than the end product, the *how* rather than the *what*] asks you to consider releasing unwanted muscular tension rather than countering tension with more tension. We want to discover when and where we are overexerting and look to redistribute the work so that it is not excessive in any one area. (25-26)

Fundamentals specific to the Alexander Technique are "inhibition" and "primary control." "Inhibition" refers to the choice *not* to react habitually and automatically, learning that when the associated stimulus is presented one has three choices: to react the same as originally learned, to react differently in a more efficient way, or to not react at all (Nettl-Fiol and Vanier 25). "Primary control" refers to "the way in which our head/neck/back relationship is a primary influence and dynamic organizer for the coordination of our whole body mechanism and all our movements" (Nettl-Fiol and Vanier 24). It is the awareness to this relationship that is central in organizing the entire being, through dynamic and structured postural support, beginning with the head. Primary control is also one of Alexander's "Four Concepts of Good Use" which include: let the neck be free and the head move forward and up, away from the top of the spine; let the torso lengthen and widen; allow the legs to release away from the hip joints; and let the

shoulders release out to the side and float on the rib cage (*For Dancers: The Alexander Technique*, DVD. 2005.)

Jane Kosminsky, Alexander instructor in the Juilliard Dance Division, commented that the Alexander Technique is "a *thinking* technique, not a *doing* technique…It's a psychophysical method for the examination and changing of habit."[3] According to Alexander proponents, practicing this technique can serve as a guide to better postural alignment, spatial awareness, and self-confidence, simply through active thought.[4] Not only is it useful for the practice of a dancer's technical form and artistic expression, but also in daily life. According to Glenna Batson, dance artist, physical therapist, Alexander teacher, and movement educator, in her article "Somatic Studies and Dance", she states, "The [Alexander Technique] has no special physical or therapeutic exercises…The emphasis of the training is on learning to employ these principles in everyday personal 'use'" (3).

Laban Movement Analysis/Bartenieff Fundamentals

An extremely influential figure in the creation and evolution of European modern dance, Rudolf von Laban (1879-1958) continues to live on through his work in dance notation as well as movement exploration and analysis (Eddy 10). His work identified concepts of human expression through movement, categorizing them into Effort, Space, Shape, Action of Body Parts, and Group Relationships (Hackney 1). Irmgard Bartenieff (1900-1981), a student of Laban's, significantly contributed to Laban's work on the system we know today as Laban Movement Analysis. She also furthered the fields of dance therapy and dance anthropology, as

[3] Personal phone interview with Jane Kosminsky conducted on 6 November 2014.
[4] Personal phone interview with Shannon Lee Jones conducted on 26 November 2014; Personal phone interview with Rebecca Paul conducted on 16 November 2014.

well as her own ideas into the Bartenieff Fundamentals of Movement (Eddy 15). According to Peggy Hackney, former student and colleague of Bartenieff and author of *Making Connections: Total Body Integration Through Bartenieff Fundamentals*, it was Bartenieff's background in physical therapy that integrated an emphasis of the "full body" to Laban's work—"the importance of 'internal body connectivity' making movement come alive both *within* the individual and *out* in the world" (emphasis added) (Hackney 1).

Core principles driving the work of Irmgard Bartenieff include, but are not limited to, Total Body Connectivity, Breath Support, Grounding, Intent, Stability-Mobility, Exertion-Recuperation, Phrasing, Personal Uniqueness, and Developmental Progression (Hackney 39-49). Bartenieff was resistant to codify her exercises since her particular interest in one concept would often change or take a different direction with new research (Hackney 7). She did, however, co-write *Body Movement: Coping with the Environment* with Dori Lewis, which included the conceptual framework for her work on "Fundamentals" (Hackney 8). These "Fundamentals" help students explore basic neurological or developmental patterns, which Bonnie Bainbridge-Cohen (former student of Bartenieff's) further expanded upon and developed into her own method of Body-Mind Centering (Hackney 8; Bainbridge Cohen).

Developmental patterns are established through the developmental process of humans, from fetal movement to infants crawling to walking. As Bainbridge Cohen states in her book *Sensing, Feeling, and Action: The Experiential Anatomy of Body-Mind Centering,*

> Development is not a linear process but occurs in overlapping waves with each stage containing elements of all the others. Because each previous stage underlies and supports each successive stage, any incomplete development or skipping of any stage leads to perceptual/movement problems. By returning to these basic patterns we can repattern our responses and establish more efficient nervous pathways to support our movement. (16)

From these developmental patterns, Peggy Hackney cultivated six "Patterns of Total Body Connectivity" that include Breath, Core-Distal, Head-Tail, Upper-Lower, Body-Half, and Cross-Lateral (Hackney 42-43). I utilized Hackney's "Patterns" in my workshop with the undergraduates, and they have influenced my own pedagogical approach to dance, specifically ballet.

Bartenieff Fundamentals aid dancers in "remembering" these developmental patterns—"as a *re-education* into body connection"—so they can have access to the full range of expression within their bodies (Hackney 19). Bartenieff discusses a dancer in her Fundamentals class who learned the importance of letting his own breath pattern initiate his movements. She explains how the dancer could not comprehend corrections given to him in ballet class, until he was able to apply anatomical ideas to his movements. Concepts taught in Bartenieff's classes, such as using energy efficiently and grounding one's weight, enabled the dancer to understand how to move his body more fluidly without overexerting himself (Bartenieff 194). In the chapter "Why Return to Fundamental Patterns?" Peggy Hackney notes in her book that,

> Fundamentals helps the individual re-pattern and re-enliven effective kinetic chains in the muscles by providing a perspective on patterning, a few basic exercises, and a lot of chance to use the newly discovered patterns in personal ways. In doing this, the individual also discovers expressive possibilities which might evolve out of the new basic connectivity. (Hackney 23)

Ideokinesis

From the Greek root "ideo" meaning idea and "kinesis" meaning movement, Ideokinesis literally means the idea of movement (Overby and Dunn 9). It began in the early 1900s with American somatic pioneer, anatomist, and author Mabel Ellsworth Todd (1880-1956). She proposed and studied the idea that by visualizing movement without physically moving, one could create new, more efficient neurological patterns and therefore change the movement

(Sweigard 6). According to Martha Eddy in her article, *A Brief History of Somatic Practices and Dance: Historical Development of the Field of Somatic Education and its Relationship to Dance*, Todd was prompted to find her own means of recovery after a paralyzing accident in which she was told she would never walk again (13). Eddy states that as a means to successful healing, Todd utilized active thought processes "by developing imagery about the anatomically balanced use of the body" (Eddy 13).

Todd served as an influential teacher to Lulu Sweigard at Teacher's College, Columbia University. Sweigard is responsible for furthering her mentor's research, giving Ideokinesis its name and fostering its widespread use in the dance community (Sweigard 7; Overby and Dunn 9). While teaching Anatomy for Dancers at Juilliard, Sweigard also developed the Posture Laboratory. Here the students were evaluated and provided with individualized reeducation utilizing Ideokinesis, or as she defined it, the use of thought and visualization in order to produce better mechanical balance and neuromuscular coordination (Overby and Dunn 9; Sweigard 7).

As Sweigard states in her book, *Human Movement Potential: Its Ideokinetic Facilitation,* "all facets of movement and all basic ingredients which make up and influence movement must be thoroughly explored and examined before Ideokinesis can be applied" (7). Essentially, one must have a thorough understanding of anatomy and kinesiology—the components and structure of the body and how it moves—in order for the utility of Ideokinesis to be successful.

Irene Dowd, Sweigard's protégé and current teacher of Anatomy for Dancers at Juilliard, wrote the article "Ideokinesis: The 9 Lines of Movement." In this article, Dowd discusses Sweigard's concept that visualizing movement can train the nervous system to produce new patterns due to its plasticity (Dowd 38-39). The most beneficial time to do this is during the

Constructive Rest Position,[5] or when your body is not working against gravity and therefore can "empty" and completely let go of any holding (Dowd 39). The last step of Ideokinesis is to physically attempt the movements after visualizing them during Constructive Rest (Dowd 39).

Although Sweigard developed the "9 Lines of Movement" in the late 1930s after many years of study on posture, they are still applicable today (Dowd 40). With the cuing of these lines, Sweigard sought to bring the weights of her clients' axial skeletons as close to their lines of gravity as possible and lower their centers of gravity; therefore minimizing the over-all muscle activity required to maintain a person in the upright position (Dowd 40). From my own experience, incorporating the "9 Lines of Movement" into ballet classes has proven to be beneficial for dancers, cultivating a better understanding of their bodies in motion.

Insights from Injury

Similar to the paths somatic pioneers traveled to find alternative methods of healing, dancers often discover somatic practices due to the onset of injury. Former Paul Taylor dancer and current Alexander teacher at Juilliard Jane Kosminsky discusses how practicing the Alexander Technique during her performing career was a way "to survive and keep dancing"—of which she continued for well over a decade through a knee injury.[6] Reflecting on the lessons of injury, she says,

> It's a very important thing to be able to, at some point, slow dancers down because we are so speedy and [focused on end results]. It's a short career compared to others… What I like about [the Alexander Technique] among other

[5] The most common Constructive Rest Position is to lay supine with knees bent creating hip flexion. Sweigard prescribed that "the distribution of [the body's] structural weight should balance the body so that no muscle work need to be added to maintain equilibrium in the position" (Sweigard 216). The legs can be placed on a chair and bound with a tie at the thighs to maintain hip-width, bringing both hips and knees into 90-degree flexion (Sweigard 217).
[6] Personal phone interview with Jane Kosminsky conducted on 6 November 2014.

> benefits is it does help with injury prevention, and if you are injured it helps you heal more quickly. (Kosminsky)

Shannon Lee Jones, current Alexander teacher for the undergraduate dancers at The Boston Conservatory and former Broadway performer, also found the Alexander Technique by recommendation from her doctor while rehabilitating a back injury. Jones says, "To be honest, I don't think I would've ever tried the Alexander Technique. I wouldn't have been committed to it as much, had I not had the experience dealing with chronic pain…It's fantastic work, and changed my life dramatically, but I don't think I would've ever done it."[7]

I believe introducing somatic practices and concepts during dance training, specifically in the BFA dance program setting, helps educate students about injury prevention, as well as how to care for injuries intelligently if they do occur. Cathy Young, Director of the Dance Division at The Boston Conservatory, notes that including somatic practices and approaches into the curriculum keeps the amount of injuries low, even though the program is extremely rigorous with students dancing in the studio seven to eight hours a day. She also sees injured students take their recoveries as opportunities to repattern and reassess personal movements.[8]

The following chapter looks more closely at how somatic practices are included into the curriculum of two conservatory BFA dance programs, The Boston Conservatory and The Juilliard School.

[7] Personal phone interview with Shannon Lee Jones conducted on 26 November 2014.
[8] Personal phone interview with Cathy Young conducted on 24 November 2014.

CHAPTER THREE

Looking at the Role of Somatics in Undergraduate Dance Curricula

Undergraduate dance conservatory programs in the United States are challenged to provide the optimal curriculum to properly train and prepare students to enter the professional dance world. BFA dance programs differ in the specific techniques and styles they require, as well as the complementary courses offered, such as anatomy and kinesiology, composition and improvisation, music, acting, and somatics. This chapter investigates how two long-standing conservatory BFA dance programs, The Juilliard School and The Boston Conservatory, integrate somatic practices into their curricula. Through personal interviews with current faculty and students, I have discovered how this integration can be key in the pre-professional training of dancers. First, I will provide a brief look back at the history of dance in university programs.

A Brief Overview of Dance in Higher Education in America

Somatic thought has influenced dance programs in the university setting since their earliest beginnings. In 1887, Harvard Summer School's physical education department offered "Aesthetic Dance," a course for women including expressions of movement and speech with a mind, body, and spirit connection, and strongly influenced by the Delsartian system (McPherson 5). In 1918, Gertrude Colby established a dance education program at Teachers College of Columbia University, whose focus was expressing ideas and emotions from within through "Natural Dancing" or free movements such as walking, skipping, and leaping (McPherson 6). A previous student of Colby's and Harvard Summer School, Margaret H'Doubler established the first undergraduate dance degree within the Physical Education Department of the University of Wisconsin at Madison in 1926-1927 (McPherson 6). H'Doubler's theoretical framework for

dance education combined dance as an expressive art form with the biological sciences, emphasizing the connection between mind and body (Eddy 10; McPherson 6-7).

Greatly influenced by the work of H'Doubler, Martha Hill headed the dance program at Bennington College in 1932, the first time a dance program was placed outside of the Physical Education Department and into the Fine Arts (McPherson 7, 146). She also shaped the summer dance conservatory program at The Bennington School of the Dance in 1934, which continued at Connecticut College School of Dance/American Dance Festival in 1948 (McPherson 146-147). In her book, *The Contributions of Martha Hill to American Dance and Dance Education, 1900-1995,* author Elizabeth McPherson states, "In 1951, Hill and Juilliard president William Schuman established the Juilliard Dance Division, [a program] focused on conservatory training with the primary goal of training dance performers and choreographers" (147). Hill developed the first conservatory model for a BFA program, one that is rooted in somatic thought, and still exists today.

Somatic Offerings within BFA Conservatory Dance Programs

The Juilliard School's Dance Division has included somatic methods since 1956 with the appointment of Dr. Lulu Sweigard by Director Martha Hill (Overby and Dunn 9; Sweigard *v*). In addition to Sweigard's *Ideokinesis,* taught currently by her protégé Irene Dowd within the Experiential Anatomy class, the Alexander Technique is the required somatic course for all Juilliard dance majors. Alexander instructor, Juilliard alumna, and former dancer with the Paul Taylor Dance Company, Jane Kosminsky discusses the guiding principle within the Alexander technique, "thinking to make change":

> It's not really just about movement. It's about making changes in alignment, in sound, in breath, in dynamic. If you're a dancer maybe it means you can create

> line in a better way, attack in a better way… [The Alexander Technique] enables you to learn to do things easily, and they would actually be easier, but would look more dangerous, which I like because I like theatrical dancing… I wanted to share this tool with young people and pass it on, so they can have safer and longer careers. (Kosminsky)

Kosminsky teaches the Alexander technique to freshman students for one semester as part of their required coursework. She meets with them twice a week, once as a group to teach guiding principles such as Alexander's Four Concepts of Good Use,[9] and then with each student for an individual private session. Current Juilliard senior Blake Krapels explained in an interview the one-on-one sessions are beneficial not only to review the concepts learned in group session, but also to ask questions.[10] Krapels continued, "Each [individual] session is completely tailored to each student. Jane encourages us to bring questions. It's an open dialogue; she's there for any ideas, thoughts, or questions that you have."

In comparison, The Boston Conservatory also has a long-standing relationship with the Alexander Technique in all divisions, including Music, Drama, and Dance. In their second year, dance students enroll in a year long Alexander course. This is taken alongside an Experiential Anatomy course which emphasizes application to "release techniques," current modern dance styles based in somatic principles. Cathy Young, Director of the Dance Division, has been implementing a greater somatic influence into the curriculum since she arrived four years ago. Freshman students take a course entitled The Dancer's Toolkit, which is an introductory course providing students with different approaches to holistic practice, self care, injury prevention, nutrition, and even the psychology of resilience. Young explained the setup of the curriculum is

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[9] As noted in chapter two, *The Four Concepts of Good Use* include: let the neck be free and the head move forward and up, away from the top of the spine; let the torso lengthen and widen; allow the legs to release away from the hip joints; and let the shoulders release out to the side and float on the rib cage (*For Dancers: The Alexander Technique*, DVD. 2005.)

[10] Personal phone interview with Blake Krapels conducted on 9 November 2014.

such that the students' second year is a year of "deconstruction"; she believes the deep analysis of technique and training is better in the sophomore year because as freshman they are adjusting to a great deal of change.[11]

Juilliard senior Blake Krapel's commentary supports Young's beliefs. He spoke of how in his first year he was coping with a completely new environment and constant stimulus, saying "My brain was going so many different places all at once."[12] Much of the information learned as a freshman has made more sense to him now in his fourth and final year. Krapels explained how he has a greater ease of applying Alexander principles to all aspects of his dancing, and how it has gone hand in hand with finding a more focused and centered way of approaching daily life.

Both Juilliard and The Boston Conservatory offer additional, physically active mind-body techniques including: Pilates, Yoga, Gyrokinesis, and Floor Barre. At Juilliard, they are considered electives, with Pilates and Gyrokinesis only available if you are chosen as a scholarship student. The Boston Conservatory requires students to take at least one mind-body course of their choice each semester to complement their technical studio training.

Kosminsky believes having exposure to many supplemental techniques can be confusing for the students at times, yet because everyone is an individual and will require different methods to support their bodies, the students will filter through the information and ultimately choose what works for them.[13] Shannon Lee Jones, Alexander instructor at The Boston Conservatory, also agrees the students receive an immense amount of information, yet she allows them to decipher it on their own: "I let them figure it out…the Alexander technique is designed to do that. You have to experience it. By teaching the students to experience it, they can make up their

[11] Personal phone interview with Cathy Young conducted on 24 November 2014.
[12] Personal phone interview with Blake Krapels conducted on 9 November 2014.
[13] Personal phone interview with Jane Kosminsky conducted on 6 November 2014.

own minds on what works and what doesn't."[14] In this way, the students become empowered, taking responsibility for their own choices, ideas, and actions to implement change.

Making Connections from Somatics to Dance Technique

Even though somatics courses may be required within curriculum does not necessarily indicate students will take this knowledge and actively apply it to their dance training. A sense of openness, willingness, and interest towards the work is necessary for dancers to utilize somatic principles as a means to growth in movement, self-care, and practice. Rebecca Paul, current third year student at The Boston Conservatory, is an example of one of these students. She found the effects of somatics were most noticeable in her ballet classes. She described not having to "force as much" in her barre work:

> Once I started thinking about it more and trusting that I had the technique, knowing that it was there, it opened up a lot of avenues for inhabiting movement in a more organic way…it flowed more, and I did have more control because I was aware. (Paul)

For students to actively apply somatic principles within technique classes, it is necessary not only that they have an interest and openness to somatic work, but also that technique teachers create an environment fostering the exploration of those ideas. Brodie and Lobel support this by saying,

> Even when dance students have access to separate somatic courses, they do not always know how to implement their new insights into their dance technique classes and performance situations. In order for the learner to integrate movement information and awareness gleaned from somatic training, they must have opportunities to transfer that knowledge to the target context of dance technique class or performance. (Brodie and Lobel 7-8)

[14] Personal phone interview with Shannon Lee Jones conducted on 26 November 2014.

Rebecca Paul's ballet teacher at The Boston Conservatory, Marcus Schulkind, former professional dancer with the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company and the Batsheva Dance Company, brings a strong awareness of the mind-body connection into his classes. His certifications in Pilates and Zena Rommett Floor Barre also directly influence his pedagogical approach. With his cuing, he allows students time to embody somatic concepts while still keeping the flow of a traditional ballet class.

In comparison, Alexandra Wells, teacher at Juilliard and former professional dancer, also infuses somatic ideas into her ballet classes. She is versed in anatomical biomechanics and allows students to sense and learn from within their own bodies. Senior Blake Krapels described the "image check" that Wells guides students through, which includes a combination of experiential anatomy exercises and a form of standing Ideokinesis. In the beginning of class while students stand at the barre with eyes closed, Wells reiterates concepts and imagery the class has focused on each week. For example, envisioning a line of ants marching up the psoas to the navel encourages lengthening in the front of the hips and a release of the tailbone downward to find a neutral pelvis. Being given the time to go slow, Krapels notes that he was able to absorb the images into his mind and body, as well as connect the principles from his Alexander classes.[15] Krapels says bringing his knowledge from Alexander into ballet gave him a "refreshing new mindset to approach class" and having this approach reinforced by Wells was in turn making the connection more meaningful and long lasting for him.

Shannon Lee Jones, Alexander instructor at The Boston Conservatory, says she greatly sees the influence of the somatic technique in her students from observing their ballet classes as

[15] Personal phone interview with Blake Krapels conducted on 9 November 2014.

well as their performances.[16] She explains because students may begin to feel the changes throughout the year, but not necessarily be able to articulate them, she videotapes each one individually in the first week of her class and then again at the end of the year. They perform a guided improvisation based on the same technical elements or piece of choreography each time, so they can compare the two. Jones says her students have "light bulb moments" when they view both videos at the end of the year, that "everything [they've] been working on the whole year becomes clear." She describes the students' movements as fuller and richer, observing an increase in connectivity within themselves and to the space around them.

Cathy Young, Director of the Dance Division at The Boston Conservatory, expresses that while there are those faculty members who value somatic ideas within technique classes, she has felt pushback from others.[17] She believes teachers who are not as quick to embrace this newer approach to dance training hold this opinion because it was not the way they were trained. She explains how essential it is to find the right balance between a traditional way of teaching dance technique and a more somatic approach:

> Truthfully, we would not be serving the students well if we didn't value resilience and toughness…It's trying to create a climate where the students are both encouraged to listen to themselves, to trust their intuition and take care of themselves, but also to be resilient and to value strength. (Young)

As a former dancer, Alexander instructor Jane Kosminsky understands the demands placed upon the students and the difficulty in translating somewhat vague cues or corrections within a studio technique class, specifically ballet. She explained:

> [The Alexander Technique] has been a way for me to help my students translate the corrections they've been hearing forever… pull up, shoulders down and back, turn out more, kick higher, go higher, hold your ribs in, and you do all of that and you can't move. You can't breathe. [The Alexander Technique] is a way to see

[16] Personal phone interview with Shannon Lee Jones conducted on 26 November 2014.
[17] Personal phone interview with Cathy Young conducted on 24 November 2014.

> *how* to get your shoulders down and back, *how* do you really drop your ribs without holding them in, *how* do you pull up. We don't pull up, we think up. It's really quite simple. (Kosminsky)

In speaking with all the research participants it became clear that while somatic techniques may serve as a tool for dance students to make connections and improvements, they are not a panacea for creating the strongest, most well rounded dancer. As Jane Kosminsky said, "Nothing is substitute for dancing."[18] Nothing can replace the amount of time spent in the studio, and in performance, training and refining technique and artistry. However, learning and practicing somatics can create a more thoughtfully aware movement artist, which can only complement the many tools a dancer acquires throughout his or her career.

In summary, it is my belief that the undergraduate dance conservatory program is an optimal setting to implement somatic techniques. Somatic concepts can help dancers process, translate, and make decisions about the influx of information they receive, ultimately preparing them to enter the professional world. Learning somatic principles can also lead to self-empowerment within the students through knowledge that stimulates students to take agency over their own instruments, thoughts, and approaches to movement. Timing is important to note when including a somatic practice into undergraduate curriculum, especially in relation to when the students take anatomy courses. Finally, in order for somatic concepts to serve as a key in conservatory training, the openness towards, and interest in, a deeper somatic knowledge must be present within the student, reinforced by the technique teachers, and valued by the direction of the department at large.

[18] Personal phone interview with Jane Kosminsky conducted on 6 November 2014.

CHAPTER FOUR

Creating a Pedagogical Framework

When I began to create a syllabus for my thesis research project, I struggled to delimit the amount of information I would share with the undergraduates. Which somatic concepts and from what methods would be the most helpful in making connections to ballet? In my research, I came across the book *Dance and Somatics: Mind-Body Principles of Teaching and Performance*. Julie Brodie, Associate Professor of Dance at Kenyon College, in partnership with Elin Lobel, somatic practitioner and Associate Professor of Kinesiology at Towson University, co-authored this highly useful resource. The authors define four fundamental principles central to many somatic practices: breath, kinesthesia/sensing, connectivity, and initiation and intention (Brodie and Lobel 5). These principles were distilled from the somatic disciplines I briefly discussed in chapter two (the Alexander Technique, Laban Movement Analysis/Bartenieff Fundamentals, and Ideokinesis), as well as the somatic practices of Body-Mind Centering and the Feldenkrais Method. I used the four principles as a guide to structure my workshop, in addition to the topic of "Experiential Anatomy." This chapter serves to give brief background information of each concept for reference in the reading of chapter five, which details the research project.

Breath and Kinesthesia

Awareness to breath is fundamental to most somatic practices. It is the center of our life force as humans and the most basic movement in our bodies. As it is mostly an involuntary process, heightening dancers' awareness to their breath sheds light on habitual movement patterns as well as access to new movement options (Brodie Lobel 39, 51). As Brodie and Lobel note,

> Historically somatic techniques have used awareness and focus on the breath to elicit change within the respiratory system as it functions under both voluntarily and involuntarily control. This change, in turn, influences the *whole* organism and the ability to perform optimally (emphasis added). (Brodie and Lobel 40)

Kinesthesia is defined by Merriam-Webster as "a sense mediated by receptors located in muscles, tendons, and joints and stimulated by bodily movements." Essentially, it is our sense of body movement and position in space. Though some discrepancies exist, the terms kinesthesia and proprioception are often used interchangeably. Glenna Batson, dance artist, physical therapist, Alexander teacher, and movement educator, co-authored the book *Body and Mind in Motion: Dance and Neuroscience in Conversation* with Margaret Wilson, in which she states, "Motor control science recognizes kinesthesia and proprioception as vital neuromuscular processes underlying body orientation, postural control and balance" (91).

In the scope of this research, guiding dance students to "listen" to their bodies by honing in on their kinesthetic sense aids in understanding their natural movement patterns, both those that are efficient as well as hindering (Brodie and Lobel 6). Brodie and Lobel discuss the benefits of emphasizing kinesthesia for dancers, stating that "encouraging students to leave everything else at the door and giving them time to focus inward on their bodies can help set them up for a richer, more rewarding class experience…transitioning from external to internal sensing" (Brodie and Lobel 79).

In my opinion, utilizing kinesthesia in dance training also enables students to better comprehend their own bodies within codified techniques, such as ballet. For example, in classical ballet there are specific shapes and movements that make up the vocabulary. The expectations of the "balletic body" in today's dance world is one with a great amount of "turnout" or external rotation of the legs in the hip sockets, long lithe limbs, and flexible yet strong feet (among many other aspects). It can be extremely difficult for those whose bodies are

different than the aforementioned "ideal model" (Warren 64-70). Students are better equipped to discover how to successfully accomplish ballet vocabulary with their own bodies by understanding their own natural movement patterns. Instead of mimicking a movement's shape demonstrated by a teacher, a shape a student's personal anatomy may never allow, kinesthesia allows a student to utilize patterns that are more efficient for his or her individual body.

Connectivity

The somatic concept of connectivity is helpful in many aspects of dance. Connectivity is often broken down into three levels: internal connectivity within the self that is physically "passive" (visualizing and sensing without moving), internal connectivity within the self that is physically "active" (utilizing developmental patterns to move), and connectivity of the self to the environment (engagement with the space and sounds, objects, energy, and people in it) (Brodie and Lobel 106-114).

Concepts helpful in understanding connectivity include "yield and push," "reach and pull," "mobility versus stability," and "dynamic alignment." Both "yield and push" and "reach and pull" are ideas taken from research on human developmental motor patterns, and are helpful for dancers to gain insight on understanding a movement's trajectory and recovery. For example, when looking at a *grand jeté,* a large thrown leap into the air, the "yield" would refer to the recovery or landing on one leg, and the "push" would refer to the trajectory or push off into the air. "Reach and pull" could refer to the spatial intent and energetic quality needed to soar through the air in a full split with minimal tension (Hackney 90-91). Comprehending and practicing these patterns can not only enable a dancer to protect the body and use muscles more efficiently, but also fully express a chosen stylistic aesthetic (soft, strong, extended, and/or angular).

The concept of "mobility versus stability" is inherent in a discussion about connectivity in ballet because in order to be connected within the body, there is usually an opposition of energy present. Consider *développé* for example.[19] The standing leg is *stable*, grounded and connected into the floor, so that the working leg can be *mobile* and free to unfold and extend into space. This opposition can also be seen in Peggy Hackney's Core-Distal Pattern of Total Body Connectivity. In a *développé,* the unfolding of the legs and arms (*distal* ends of the body) occurs energetically from, and maintains a connection to, the center of the body (*core)*. Enacting this way of thinking can change a dancer's physical performance of the step, making it more balanced and aligned, and therefore enabling more freedom for fullness and expression.

As Brodie and Lobel state, "Because of its structural connections, the body is one kinetic chain. This statement merely means that movement of one part affects the rest" (Brodie and Lobel 106). This idea directly ties into the concept of "dynamic alignment," or the idea that in order to align the body in its optimum state for movement, it cannot be held in a static shape. In her article "Teaching Alignment" Glenna Batson discusses how the historical optimum alignment according to a "Cartesian mechanical model" has since transitioned to a dynamic systems model, noting the work of somatics pioneers, especially the Todd/Sweigard/Dowd lineage (Batson 134-149). Batson offers suggestions in "re-conceptualizing" the teaching of alignment for dance, including "shifting from thinking of position to action, emphasizing autonomy and self-regulation in organizing movement, and conceiving alignment as a function of creative problem solving, not repetition" among others (Batson 149). Human movement is self-regulating. It is constantly changing. Drawing students' awareness to connectivity enables

[19] A balletic movement in which the working leg is drawn up to the knee of the standing leg and extended into space creating an open position; performed in three directions (front, side, back).

them to listen and attend to subtle shifts and changes within their bodies, as well as the environment around them.

Intention and Initiation

> In an art in which the body is the instrument of expression, dancers must be specific and clear in what they are intending and where and how that movement begins in order to communicate an honest physical statement. In this way, initiation and intention lie at the heart of the mind-body connection. (Brodie and Lobel 150)

As Brodie and Lobel state above, the concepts of intention and initiation are extremely important for performing artists, especially dancers. Both concepts make the art form come alive by aiding not only in technically executing vocabulary, but also expressing thoughts, ideas, and emotions through movement.

Along with stages of motor development, or how the body processes and learns movement over time, there are concepts from Laban Movement Analysis's Body Category that are helpful in exploring and understanding intention and initiation. An example of this is body part initiation, within the body attitude subcategory. For example, exploring whether *arabesque* initiates from the back leg lifting, the toes reaching out into space, or the working thigh spiraling outward in opposition from the standing thigh, will create different energetic qualities and physical movements.[20] Peggy Hackney's method for analyzing movement sequencing through the body is helpful in determining whether a movement should be performed all at once (simultaneous) or in parts (successive or sequential). Along with movement sequencing is Hackney's concept of phrasing, or the dynamics behind intention and initiation. This applies to

[20] An *arabesque* is a balletic movement performed on one leg with the opposite leg lifted into the air, extended straight behind the body; arms vary.

whether a movement's intensity would increase (impactive), decrease (impulsive) or stay consistent (even).

Bringing awareness to choosing a clear intention and direct initiation can help dancers from falling into "mindless movement" or inefficient habitual patterns. When choice is involved, a movement becomes a preference and not a pattern—an emotional expression and a refining of artistry (Brodie and Lobel 147).

Experiential Anatomy

As Lulu Sweigard stated in her book *Human Movement Potential: Its Ideokinetic Facilitation,* in order to fully find utility and success with Ideokinesis, one must have a thorough understanding of the body's basic anatomical structure and biomechanics (Sweigard 7). An understanding of anatomy is also essential in determining facts versus fictions about human movement possibilities in a ballet class.

To help the students learn about anatomy, I chose to include Sweigard's "9 Lines of Movement" and Irene Dowd's anatomical choreographies entitled "Orbits" and the "Turnout Dance."[21] Designed specifically for dancers, Dowd has choreographed many creative ways to learn about anatomy experientially through the movement of one's own body, as well as train functional anatomical actions through continuous movements. The amount of knowledge inherent within Dowd's choreographies is abundant, and I value the experiential learning she has structured by bringing theory into physical practice. I have found great effectiveness with Dowd's choreographies through personal experience, having studied them with my modern

[21] For more information, please refer to Irene Dowd's article "Ideokinesis: 9 Lines of Movement," as well as the section on Ideokinesis in chapter two. For full choreography and sequences of "Orbits" and "Turnout Dance" refer to Dowd's DVD *Movement Preparation for Dance.*

dance teacher Gerald Casel during my undergraduate program at NYU, an independent study last summer, as well as learning additional variations from Irene Dowd in a workshop setting. Though the choreographies are exploratory in nature, they are physically demanding and challenging.

"Orbits" actively investigates the anatomy of the pelvis, mainly performed on one leg, requiring core engagement, balance, and control. For example, the first two movements in the choreography demonstrate the mobility and stability both the femur/thigh and the pelvis/hip can have at different moments. Beginning first with a hip circle on one leg, one understands the standing leg/femur is stable while the pelvis is mobile, rotating around the femur. Conversely, the next movement is a *rond de jambe* of the free leg—the leg/femur is mobile drawing a circle in space, which moves independently from the stable pelvis. This is an example of only two movements from a much longer phrase that explores concepts including, but not limited to, muscle engagement needed to stabilize the pelvis, range of motion of external and internal rotation, and proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation, or PNF, patterns.[22]

The "Turnout Dance" is similar to "Orbits" in its physically challenging yet exploratory nature. However, it is performed lying down and seated, as opposed to standing. This is to appropriately build physical strength and stamina in the "turnout muscles," or external rotators of the hip, by using gravity as natural resistance. This lessens the amount of stabilizing muscular work the rotators would have to perform if done standing, evident in "Orbits."

[22] Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation is a complex system physical therapists use for rehabilitation. It developed through the research of neurophysiologist Dr. Herman Kabat in the early 1940s (Erkert 61). PNF patterns are based on functional movement patterns of diagonals and spirals, alternating mobility/stability, stretch/strength, and simultaneously utilizing three spatial pulls instead of only one (Hackney 185-186).

One idea I would like to note before chapter five, and the details of the workshop, is somatics' relationship with dance as a way of "getting back to basics" and "debriefing the body of unwanted habits of movement" (Bales 2). For some, this can lead to concerns of turning one into a "wet noodle," a dull performer lacking muscle tone or the use of dynamics (Madden 371-372). There is also the concern that the use of somatic principles within a technical style, such as ballet, will strip the technique of its rich and detailed nuances. I would like to clarify that in this research project, it is not my intention to change ballet technique fundamentals, alter the structure of the technique class, or remove classical elements such as musicality, dynamics, *port de bras* (carriage of the arms), or *épaulement* (the use of the shoulders and head in relation to body positions). On the contrary, it is my opinion that learning and applying somatic concepts to ballet can enrich dancers' awareness and use of technical components such as *épaulement*, aiding in a more seamless integration into the body.

CHAPTER FIVE

Research Project with Undergraduate Students

Throughout the course of this research project, I was curious to find which somatic concepts could help undergraduate dancers in their practice of, and approach to, ballet specifically. The structure of the workshop involved teaching somatic concepts to the undergraduates and exploring application to classical ballet vocabulary through an open forum free for discussion, experiments, and questions.

Over the course of eight weeks, I met with a group of current undergraduate dance majors at the University of California, Irvine for a total of ten sessions.[23] I recruited approximately thirty students and based on availability, thirteen students became participants. Participants varied in technical ability, gender, age, and dance focus (those that identify as ballet, jazz, and/or modern dancers). I was acquainted with most students through shared classes and/or social interactions on campus. Since participation was voluntary, there was no school credit involved and students were not required to attend every session. Though students' ballet training varied, it was each participant's first time learning about somatic ideas in depth.

As stated in chapter four, I structured the workshop based on the concepts of breath, kinesthesia/sensing, connectivity, initiation and intention, as well as exploring anatomy experientially. Each session's focus created its own unique results; therefore, for each topic discussed below, I will provide a brief overview of the exercises utilized as well as reflective findings. In chapter six, I will discuss emergent themes from the overall workshop.

[23] This human-subjects research project was approved by the University of California, Irvine Institutional Review Board (UCI IRB) 9/12/2014.

Teaching and Learning with Breath and Kinesthesia

Tools I used with the students to aid in teaching breath and kinesthesia included "body scans," hands-on partner work, guided improvisations, and anatomical references (videos, diagrams, and experiential anatomy scripts). By "body scans" I mean verbally directing students to focus on specific parts or areas of their bodies, as well as to sense their weight falling into the floor and ultimately the pattern of their breaths. Jill Green, Professor of Dance and Somatics at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, describes body scans as guiding students to "[focus] on how the body wants to move rather than what the body should look like" (Green 129). I find "body scans" are helpful in heightening students' kinesthesia, awareness of sensing their own bodies from within, releasing any unneeded tension, and finding a focus for the beginning of a class or session. During this particular "body scan" I used a modified script from the article "Experiencing Our Anatomy: Incorporating Human Biology Into Dance Class Via Imagery, Imagination, and Somatics" by Johanna Kirk, to assist students in mentally tracing the anatomical path of the breath (traveling through the nose, throat, lungs, and diaphragm).

To explore breath using hands-on touch, I directed the students to first explore on their own bodies, and then in pairs alternating roles: one student placing their hands on their partner's sides of the ribcage, high on the chest, or lower abdominals, and the other partner taking full deep breaths, directing the breath into their partners' hands. Students discovered the benefits of voluntary control of their breath, and the ability to find movement in otherwise neglected areas of the body, especially their backs.

Drawing from an exercise I personally experienced in a Laban Movement Analysis course with Professor Loretta Livingston, I led the students through a movement improvisation. Every few breaths I asked the students to change their position and surface contact (prone, on

their sides, asymmetrical, standing, etc.) while alternating moving only on inhalations, exhalations, or both. We discussed how each choice assisted different "Efforts" (Light versus Heavy Weight Effort), connections to the space (moving upright versus floor work), and dance styles (ballet versus modern dance).[24]

Breath became the undercurrent for the students during the eight-week workshop. Through discussions, students reflected they most commonly applied breath in their personal practices of ballet, as well as in daily life. Some noted how it helped technically with stability, connection to the floor, and a greater use of *plié*. Others found breath became a calming and centering tool, both mentally and physically. One student shared that she is often overwhelmed in ballet class, inundated with corrections from the teacher, as well as thoughts inside her own head—something many students echoed. She noted that with the new attention to her breath, she was able to relieve some anxiety by choosing one thing to focus on. The simplicity of being able to return to her breath made her feel more in control and more successful. This in turn empowered her, a theme that emerged in many of the students' reflections throughout the workshop.

Discovering Connectivity

For our sessions on connectivity, I began with Constructive Rest, which centered the students' minds and focused their awareness to their entire body. Sequencing into a guided improvisation, I used Peggy Hackney's Patterns of Total Body Connectivity to cue students. For example, "lead with your head and let your tail follow" or "let your movement radiate out from

[24] Effort is one of four categories defined in Laban Movement Analysis. Effort includes the subcategories of Flow, Weight, Time, and Space, which subdivide into their own categories: Free and Bound Flow Effort, Light and Strong Weight Effort, Sustained and Sudden Time Effort, and Indirect and Direct Space Effort (Hackney 219-221).

your center" among others. Continuing the improvisation, I prompted the students to take their internal focus *out*, to really see with their eyes and take in the space around them, allowing the architecture of the space and everything in it to influence their physical movements. The exercise culminated with a slow contact improvisation with partners, to understand physical connections with others through the sharing of weight, space, and energy.

We discussed how different patterns felt more comfortable or organic to different people, and how each pattern made the students move differently. One student observed that she was able to access different movement options than if she had just been asked to improvise without a task. She also commented though improvising was difficult for her as a "ballet dancer" (since she is usually told the specific shapes and order of steps), she was able to connect balletic movements to the different patterns and was eager to continue exploring.

An exercise I had not planned on including, but felt in the moment would be helpful was the "crawling lizard" partner exercise.[25] Essentially, one partner is performing a crawl across the floor on their stomachs, or prone, alternating one body half reaching in extension and the other body half bent in flexion. The other partner is standing, bracing the "crawling" partner's foot (on the body half side in flexion) with his/her own foot, providing a surface for the "crawling" partner to push off from. After the students performed both roles, I had them stand up and try some *sautés*, or simple ballet jumps, feeling how much connection with the floor they could use to push off, just as they had pushed off their partners' feet. The "lizard exercise" and *sautés* physically explored the ideas of "yield and push" and "reach and pull." Students further

[25] The "crawling lizard" exercise (among others) is used to integrate the Asymmetrical Tonic Neck Reflex, a primitive reflex in infants. Research states that if primitive reflexes are not properly integrated as infants, developmental progress can be delayed (Bainbridge Cohen 104-105).

connected these ideas to the ballet exercises of *plié*, *relevé,* and *sissone*, or a jump from two feet to one foot.[26]

Through our discussion of connectivity in the ballet lexicon, we examined ideas of "mobility versus stability" and "dynamic alignment." Students took turns suggesting and demonstrating ballet steps in which they struggled finding proper alignment. They found although the body is usually divided into a "supporting side" and a "working side" in ballet (comparable to stable and mobile sides), there is always a continuous connective energy throughout the *entire* body. One student made a discovery with *rond de jambe* realizing she had to make constant subtle adjustments on her supporting side, as her working leg moved in a circular motion.[27] For example, when her working leg traveled from side to back, she had to actively shift her weight more into the ball of her standing foot and her pelvis into a posterior tilt to stay centered on top of the standing leg/femur. By understanding the connectivity of both legs working together in opposition, as well as the pelvis' relationship to each leg, she was able to find more space for her mobile leg to move and use more "turnout" or external rotation of both legs.

Common movements students struggled to find alignment were one-legged balances, such as *passé relevé* and *attitude en relevé.*[28] By asking the students which connectivity concepts could potentially help with balancing, we experimented with suggestions of Hackney's Core-Distal and Cross-Lateral Patterns of Total Body Connectivity. Students found it extremely

[26] *Relevé* occurs when the body is lifted onto the ball of the foot by raising the heels into demi pointe, can be done in various positions.
[27] *Rond de jambe* is a ballet step beginning and ending with the feet together in first position, where the mobile leg circles from front to side to back. Maintaining straight legs throughout, the direction can be reversed starting with the back line.
[28] *Attitude* is a position on one leg, with the mobile leg lifted in the back and bent at an angle of 90 degrees. *Passé* is a position on one leg, with the mobile leg lifted to create a triangular shape by connecting the toe to the supporting leg's knee.

helpful to think about the energy as being always active and continuous, moving through the body either from the center out (Core-Distal), or in spirals to aid in external rotation (Cross-Lateral). Most students admitted to previously holding, squeezing, or gripping onto a balance, which proved ineffective the majority of the time. When they instead thought of one of the Patterns of Total Body Connectivity, opposition of energy (mobility versus stability), connection to the floor (yield and push), or a shape constantly shifting and growing within a balance (dynamic alignment), they found much more success, ease, and fullness of movement.

Finding Intention and Initiation

The session on intention and initiation was based on discussion more than in other sessions. However, we did use the tool of guided improvisation (solo, partner, and group) to explore. I began with a brief overview of the progression of motor development, sharing a quote from Brodie and Lobel: "As we become more skillful, more movement and movement patterns become automatic" (Brodie and Lobel 136). This in turn allows for muscle memory to be utilized for movements we know well, freeing up the mind for the layering of more complex concepts. This led to a discussion of "habits" in dance and the fine line between muscle memory being used for efficiency and the act of performing "mindless" movement. I explained how defining clear initiation points and intentions could aid in separating the two.

By looking at specific ballet vocabulary such as *port de bras*, or the carriage of the arms, we discussed how thought could change the performance and execution of this familiar movement. A common pathway of the arms is when they travel from *en bas*, a low circular position, to *en haut*, a circular position overhead. Choosing a specific initiation, such as allowing the energy to come from underneath the arms as they rise and guiding the shoulders to roll back

and under, instead of simply lifting the arms overhead, enabled students to release unneeded tension in their shoulders and find more length and freedom in their necks.

We also considered the two sides of intention in terms of mental and physical approaches. Students suggested a clear mental intention would help convey a specific balletic aesthetic and possible story line through movement, as well as center the necessary internal attention and focus. For physical intention, we examined the differing levels of "arousal" needed for specific steps, both the quality and amount of energy. For example, a *frappé* (a quick, striking movement of the ball of the foot against the floor) and a *fondu* (a lowering of the body through a *plié* on one leg, translates to mean melted) have extremely different movement qualities, and therefore must have different intentions behind them.

The students expressed how it is difficult at times to think before you move due to habitual muscle memory, as well as the factors of speed of the choreography/exercise and pacing of the class. On the other end of the spectrum, some students brought up their tendencies to overthink or overanalyze, agreeing ultimately that trust in the self and well-defined intentions are necessary to be able to work efficiently and perform with clarity.

To have the students explore initiation and intention physically through movement, I guided students through an improvisation exercise in pairs. Inspired by an exercise I learned in Ohad Naharin's *Gaga* classes,[29] the "ball of light" exercise deems one partner the "director" who is in charge of giving touch cues on specific parts of the "mover's" body. The "mover" is responsible for visualizing the ball of light inside their body, and then physically moving their body so as to "move" the ball from the first touch point to the next point, and so on. The second improvisation exercise involved the "director" verbally calling out specific body parts the

[29] *Gaga* is the movement language developed by choreographer Ohad Naharin to gain knowledge and self-awareness of your body through guided improvisation.

"mover" had to initiate movement from. I guided the "directors" to slowly layer in more than one initiation point, giving the "mover" multiple points to alternate between and also find relationships (i.e. right shoulder; now right shoulder and left ribcage).

The students commented how these exercises helped them discover places they wouldn't normally have chosen to move from, both as the "director" and "mover." Many students mentioned a heightened awareness to the back of the body, an area in classical ballet that is not as emphasized as the front. The concept of breath resurfaced in discussion as being helpful in providing intention and initiation points, as well as connectivity in regards to the ease and difficulty in the successive and sequential movements of the body necessary in the "ball of light" exercise.

Exploring Anatomy Through Movement

To introduce Lulu Sweigard and Irene Dowd's ideokinetic guide "9 Lines of Movement" I began with a basic anatomy class including an overview of "bony landmarks" with the help of a model skeleton, diagrams, videos, and identification on students' own bodies and partners. I explained basic joint movements in regions particular to ballet movements, such as the spine and ribcage, head and neck, and pelvis/hips. With each area discussed, I would have the students explore different ballet vocabulary, so they could make anatomical connections to the movements. I noticed how unsure the students were in their anatomical knowledge, so instead of doing the prescribed reading of the "9 Lines of Movement" through the Constructive Rest Position we simply discussed them in the round.

I encouraged the students to explore these lines more actively in their ballet classes during the week ahead. This was my experiment to take a more passive, non-doing somatic

concept into a more active utilization—using the "9 Lines" as helpful imagery during classes in addition to visualizing during Constructive Rest. It was interesting to note how each student connected to a different line. One student found the line of movement *from the center of the knee to the center of the femoral joint* greatly increased her awareness of aligning and tracking the whole lower extremity (hip, knee, ankle), and aided in jumping. Another student said the two lines of movement, *to widen across the back of the pelvis* and *to narrow across the front of the pelvis,* proved extremely useful during balances to heighten connection to her core. Still, another student connected greatly to the line of movement *to narrow the ribcage*, describing how it encouraged her to initiate from other points in her body rather than only her chest.[30]

When teaching and discussing Irene Dowd's "Orbits" and "Turnout Dance" the students commented on how challenging the choreographies were. They were frustrated, felt extremely unstable and weak in specific areas (feet, hip stabilizers, external rotators), and found it difficult at times not to allow the quadriceps and other hip flexors to take over as the main movers. In following sessions, however, students returned with encouraging comments. One student noted that because she couldn't force or fake the amount of "turnout" she used while performing Dowd's choreographies she was more aware of where her turnout was coming from (feet and knees versus external rotators). This allowed her a humbling yet healthier way of working in ballet class, by engaging her hip rotator muscles instead of creating torque in her ankle and knee joints. Other students commented on less painful hip "popping" during ballet classes, more stability in balances, and better abilities at finding neutral pelvis in ballet. The students expressed their desire to explore the choreographies more in depth, due to their newfound anatomical

[30] For more information please refer to Irene Dowd's article "Ideokinesis: 9 Lines of Movement," as well as the section on Ideokinesis in chapter two.

knowledge of their own bodies, as well as lingering questions. If afforded more time, I would be interested in observing the results of students practicing Dowd's choreographies over an entire quarter, as well as hearing their own feedback.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusions

Time

One theme that arose consistently throughout my own observations, the students' feedback, and also inherent in the work of somatics, was the need for sufficient time to go slowly and explore. A philosophy of somatic work is slowing down, as Brodie and Lobel state:

> At an advanced level, slowing down brings attention back to the basics of the motor program, and by making it conscious again, the dancer is obliged to reevaluate how he or she is choosing to move. While overthinking is detrimental in a performance situation, this process of slowing down improves a dancer's ability to discern, refine, and choose what they are doing while in the rehearsal phase. (Brodie and Lobel 26)

I found early on I could have spent one month on a topic covered in only one or two sessions. Even though all the students were incredibly eager to learn, it takes time to process new concepts. The students needed much more time to think critically about the information we covered, and I would have liked to present it in more than the few ways in which I was able. Some students' feedback included the difficulty they encountered while attempting to explore new somatic ideas on their own. Because the concepts were still fresh and unfamiliar, they expressed concerns remembering exact directives or imagery. Suggestions they offered included having a separate class to learn the somatic concept followed by a ballet class cueing those concepts in action. Also, there was a desire for individual sessions.

Through our discussions, questions would often focus around ballet terminology in relation to individual alignment—essentially, "How can I accomplish this with my body?" Ideally, it would have been helpful to have three meeting times each week during the workshop: once for somatics, once for an experiential ballet class integrating somatics concepts, and once to explore individual concerns. As noted in chapter three, both The Juilliard School and The Boston

Conservatory have similar structures in their curricula, providing students with multiple opportunities to hear the information in different contexts and from various points of view. I believe it helps the students in retaining somatic information, enacting it, and carrying it with them past the school setting.

Empowerment

Another theme that emerged was empowerment within the students. The heightened body awareness from learning somatic concepts improved students' abilities to listen and attend to subtle shifts within their own bodies, as well as understand they have agency to enact change. One student commented, "I feel more in tune with my body and I have a better understanding of what's going on and what I'm doing, how to improve it." Others reflected on newfound confidence, improved self-image in ballet class, as well as a more positive attitude in their approach to ballet.

Driven by the students' commentary, one session took on a discussion about how the students' increased sensitivity to their bodies enabled them to trust themselves more and understand they are in charge of caring for their own bodies. One student expressed how she realized she needed to rely on her *own* sensations to work safely and in a healthy manner. Knowing when something felt incorrect and/or painful, she found she had the power to make appropriate choices for her own body by finding a more efficient, helpful, or suitable way for her individual alignment. Another student agreed, stating she often questioned working through pain. Through the course of the workshop, she felt she gained more knowledge to differentiate between a "healthy challenge" (an appropriate amount of strength and stamina training), and what could potentially be injurious.

Practicing somatic methods helps build strong, self-sensing, and problem-solving individuals, key elements for dancers as noted by Brodie and Lobel:

> All of these [somatic] methods recognize the importance of awareness in enacting change and empower students to find their *own* solutions to the problem, rather than just saying, "Get your shoulders down!" These various approaches to feedback also honor the fact that different dancers learn in different ways (emphasis added) (Brodie and Lobel 19).

Throughout the workshop, the students felt empowered to make the practice of ballet their own noting how they enacted their own warm-up and cool down strategies, and chose to find meditative moments during class with the use of breath. Other comments included feelings of an improved work ethic, engagement, and presence in class, as well as the freedom to take risks, question, and try things out. As one student said, "It's amazing how a single thought can change the complete feel of a movement."

Community

Another emergent theme I observed was a sense of community building among the students. Many participants conveyed the lack of opportunity to discuss issues or questions about dance in an open forum on a regular basis, if at all. They expressed how helpful and informative it was to hear others' thoughts and ideas, both similar and different from their own. One student commented how ballet class has always been a very individual, almost solitary experience for her, but she has begun to feel a greater connection to her peers. She noted how much more present and engaged she is with the energy of the class environment, recognizing a kinesthetic awareness and empathy towards those around her. She said she feels more support from fellow students by understanding they are all experiencing similar situations, and can continuously learn from one another's differences. Similarly, a student in a lower level class mentioned how comforting it was to hear from a higher level dancer struggling with similar issues.

In the dance field, especially ballet, it takes extreme self-dedication and an intense drive to succeed and continue pushing oneself forward. From personal experience, the time spent inside your own head can be lonely, grueling and, at times, negative. Also, a healthy experience with your peers can be somewhat rare as the field is extremely competitive. To find that learning somatic concepts within this workshop not only helped students improve their own self sensing and individual approach to ballet, but also their relationships with their peers, confirmed the utility and validity of this work for me. It makes me hopeful for the future of somatics within the ballet setting.

When asked, "*Are somatic methods something you will continue to practice or seek out on your own past this workshop?*" there was an incredible resounding *yes* from all participants. Not only did the students find a connection and utility to their ballet and dance practice, but also to their daily lives, stating how they were more present in everyday activities and aware of how they are using their bodies. One student wrote,

> Ultimately, I think I am more cognizant about my movement intentions. During classes and rehearsals, I find it imperative now to breathe and to truly visualize what exactly is happening in my body, what I want to happen, and how I will make the movements happen… This has really decreased a lot of strain and tension and has made movements a lot easier.

Other students commented how they want to continue utilizing this somatic way of thought in their future careers as dance teachers, choreographers, and directors, in order to build communities of thoughtful, healthy, and intelligent dancers.

Final Thoughts

This research process continues a journey I have been on since I was a young girl, and my fascination with exploring the "why's" and "how's" of movement has continued to grow.

Though an injury did not spur my exploration, as it did for many somatic pioneers, I feel similar in my desire to improve how the body can move. Confident in the knowledge and power of my own body, I am in search of tools to make movement more efficient, so, ultimately, I can express my full, unencumbered self through dance and pass this on to my students.

Though I have always had intuitively somatic ideas about how the body should move and work efficiently in a ballet class, this thesis research process has expanded my knowledge and vocabulary of concepts I am able to bring into the ballet classroom. Given the opportunity to regularly teach ballet to the UCI dance major students throughout my research process allowed me to immediately investigate my theories of integrating somatic concepts to aid in ballet technique. This has helped me improve my cueing, pacing, and timing of how I deliver somatic information in relation to specific ballet concepts, something I will continue to explore and refine for the rest of my teaching career.

I have always connected to the humanistic quality that tends to set dance apart from other performance arts, for the reason that dancers' bodies are inseparable vehicles for expression. Dance artists are constantly refining our abilities to create, shape, and present ideas through movement. This process of fine tuning is supported by heightening awareness within oneself, building trust in one's own power and skill, and also opening the connection to the space and community around. As a dancer, choreographer, teacher, and artist, I believe it is the ability to interact and clearly communicate that makes art successful. To me, this must begin with somatic thought—a key element in providing a progressive foundation to build the next generation of intelligent, well-abled, and thoughtful dancers.

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