Nur Adilah Binte Roslan, Dancer
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Somatic Practices in Dance

Farah Fadzali, February 2022

Tension and trauma get stored in our bodies on a daily basis and often do not fully released until we engage our bodies. Practices such as yoga, mindfulness, meditation, dance, when approached intentionally, allow us to tune into our internal experiences and learn to regulate our tensions and stress without avoidance. This article discusses the somatic influences on dance and the types of somatic movement practices available.

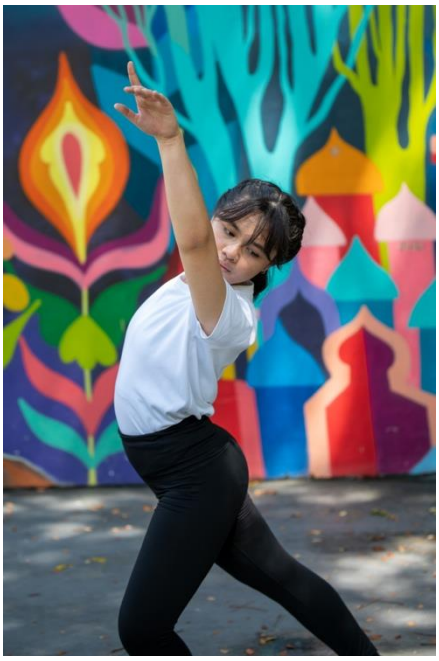
What is Somatic?

Somatic dance is a fluid movement science that is in a constant state of growth. Somatic studies have been referred to as body therapies (working on body and mind integration), movement awareness, and movement (re) education[2, 6, 8]. Once considered esoteric and far removed from daily technique class, somatic is now a household word in a dancer's training. It is frequently assimilated in the dance field and used as a tool for improvisation. The principles of somatic encourage the dancer to reconnect with their bodies by approaching it with curiosity rather than fear. Somatic further enables the dancer to cultivate awareness during dance training[2, 7].

Types of Somatic Practices in Dance Technique

Somatic practices that have been integrated readily into the dance curriculum includes Ideokinesis, The Feldenkrais Method, Alexander Technique, Body-Mind Centering, and Laban/Bartenieff. All these methods share common goals in their approaches to re-educate[3, 6]:

1. Enhancing kinaesthetic awareness in a non-judgmental and non-competitive environment
2. Using sensory awareness to modulate movement range and effort to uncover the potential for new mobility
3. Rest – resting phases in which the dancer is given time to listen to the body, clarifying what sensations have arrived and differentiate wanted from unwanted stimuli, and to consolidate motor learning.



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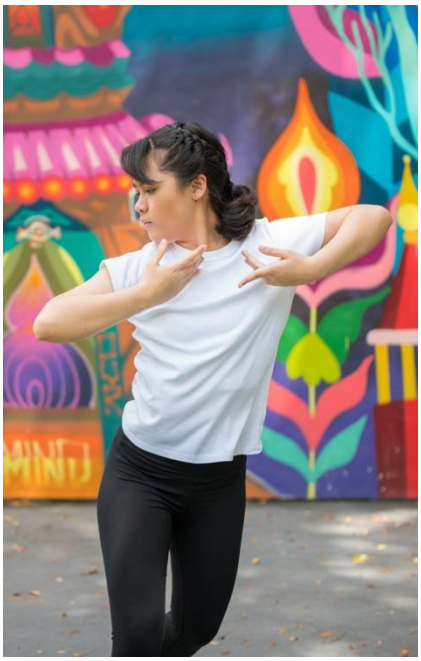
Ideokinesis

The key ingredient in Ideokinesis is visualising the movement only with the mind's eye (either as movement within the body or in space), without any perceivable sensation of muscular effort. This primes neural pathways and reprogrammes unnecessary and unwanted muscular tensions[2, 13]. Further brain imaging technology reveals that mentally practicing a motor image utilises the same brain regions as actual physical execution[2, 4]. Visualisation is a powerful tool in linking mind and body in programming intended action without excessive wear-and-tear on the body from physical practice[15].

The Feldenkrais Method

The Feldenkrais Method® is a movement-centred system of mind-body education and personal development. The work is designed to improve movement capability and freedom as well as to reduce pain or limitations in movement and improve general well-being. The method is named after Israeli physicist and judo expert, Moshe Feldenkrais, who developed an experiential approach to self-organisation through movement. Movements ideally are performed slowly with ease and quietly, below the threshold of perceived muscular effort. This is so that dancers can identify and differentiate degrees of muscular contraction that would promote a feeling of ease of movement accomplishment[2, 5, 12].



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Alexander Technique (AT)

Alexander Technique (AT) named after F. Mathias Alexander (1869-1955) developed a method of "psycho-physical re-education" in response to coping with his own chronic, recurrent laryngitis[3]. AT is an active process of conscious awareness engaged in everyday pedestrian and skilled movement. Dancers learn how to direct movement and modulate effort without visual imagery. Using the Alexander process of *Inhibition* and *Direction*, a dancer can pay exquisite attention to the movement without interfering with the inherent laws of coordination and ensure effortless full spatial usage[1, 2].

Body-Mind Centering (BMC)

The BMC learning environment ensures a space for non-judgmental self-discovery and openness. Fundamentals of learning include developmental movement patterns such as cellular awareness and breathing as a foundation for social, physical, and psychological growth and development, and an exploration of all the anatomical systems (circulatory, organs, endocrine, etc.)[1, 9].

Laban/Bartenieff

A method and language for describing, visualising, interpreting and documenting human movement, Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) is based on the original work of Rudolf Laban, which was developed and extended by Lisa Ullmann, Irmgard Bartenieff, Warren Lamb and others[10, 14]. LMA has been recognised and applied in numerous fields and particularly when dealing with movement, creativity and computation. It uses a multidisciplinary approach, incorporating contributions from anatomy, kinesiology, psychology, *Labanotation* and many other fields[2, 4].

Bartenieff Fundamentals℠ on the other hand is an extension of Laban Movement Analysis (LMA), extended and developed by Irmgard Bartenieff, who trained with Warren Lamb before becoming a physiotherapist[2, 3, 14]. Concepts and principles of kinesiological functioning are identified which are embodied in particular sequences and extended into all types of movement possibilities. It focuses on movement integration and harmony which aids an individual to move more easily and more expressively.

Benefits of Somatic Practices in Dance

Somatic practices promote a more person-centered approach to movement development than some dance techniques that are more didactic or conditioning[9, 15]. Somatic practices also foster embodied thinking and assist to tune and train attention, bringing the mind and body together, which is especially important in today's fast-paced environment.

End.

An MSc in Dance Science graduate from Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, Farah has multiple experience in teaching movement therapy in various organisations in Singapore.

Farah is now a dance science researcher studying injury prevention and performer's health and safety practices. Together with her achievements and qualifications, Farah hopes to work towards the development of dance science research in Singapore.

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