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Cover Image

"Silence" by Stephen Weiss.

CONTENTS

FEATURES

- 4 **Body Therapy and the Embodied Life with Stanley Keleman, PhD**
"An embodied life is an emerging truth about what human existence is about, and that we are in this stage of our life now in a gigantic revolution about what human values are, what human life is about, how humans can live and how they protect their internal environment." *By David Van Nuys, PhD*
- 12 **Cultivating Body Knowledge**
We are living in a world where everyone has less opportunity to move . . . and embodied wisdom is lacking. What kind of movement education do we need? *By Judy Gantz, MA, CMA*
- 18 **The Ongoing Development of "Past Beginnings"**
A further discussion of relationships between the Bartenieff Fundamentals of body movement, Body-Mind Centering,[®] and Kestenberg Movement Profile. *By Martha Eddy, CMA, RSMT, EdD*
- 36 **Moving into Joy: Introducing Somatic Art Therapy, an Integrative Model for Healing Trauma**
The author describes Somatic Art Therapy (SAT), an integrative model developed to heal early shock and developmental traumas. *By Megan Pugh, DMin, LPCC, ATR-BC, SEP*
- 40 **Embodied Writing**
The principles of somatics and intuitive inquiry hold enormous potential for research—both embrace the body as a self-reference perspective that is not only considered a valid point of view, but the basis of the discipline. *By Jeanne M. Schul, PhD*
- 44 **Somatic Reflections**
The philosophical base of Hanna Somatic Education is what actually defines Hanna Somatic Education and makes it unique and distinctive from other methods of somatic education. *By Mala Aeto*
- 46 **Sitting at the Foot of the Master: Covert Training in Compassionate Presence**
Sitting at the foot of the master is not wasted time when the apprentice is genuinely attending, seeing, and open, which is different from going through the motions and day dreaming. *By Erik Peper, PhD*
- 48 **Social Order in the Twenty-First Century, Part II**
A range of problems, largely a result of the successes of modernity that culminated in the twentieth century, is addressed, with suggestions for new approaches. *By Arthur Warmoth, PhD*

DEPARTMENTS

- A1 Reflections of the Editor
34 Poetry of Ben Rivers

- 54 Book Reviews
58 Research Articles

Cultivating Body Knowledge

By Judy Gantz, MA, CMA

For over 25 years, I have taught LabanMovement Analysis (LMA) to graduate and post-graduate dance/movement therapy students. LMA is a comprehensive system for analyzing, performing, observing, and recording the complexity of human movement based on the theories of Rudolf Laban and Irmgard Bartenieff. As a movement educator and Certified Movement Analyst (CMA), I identify the core of my pedagogy as *body knowledge*. *Body knowledge* is a term I adopted after reading the first edition of *Beyond Words: Movement Observation and Analysis* (Moore & Yamamoto, 1988). Here the authors state, “The body knowledge we have regarding movement meaning is based upon generalizations drawn from our own embodied experiences” (p. 88). Over the years, my multi-layered approach to teaching moving, perceiving, and analyzing movement has led me to refine my understanding of body knowledge.

LMA is a framework and system of movement with a specific descriptive language and notation symbols. Embodied experiences are the medium for learning LMA.¹ My classes concentrate on mind-body awareness, and stu-

dents move through space exploring a range of spatial levels, areas, and trace-forms, learn how their bodies move in different shape qualities (how the body forms itself in space), express various motion qualities (i.e., weight, space, time, and flow), and gain connectivity. Learning is congruent with moving, and students become more conscious of their own embodied responses, including any personal meaning that movement evokes. Through LMA training, students develop more than just the skills of movement observation and analysis.

Moore and Yamamoto (1988) assume that we all have body knowledge and when our “body knowledge blends the perception of movement behavior with its interpretation, it facilitates swift reaction” (p. 88). I believe there is more to body knowledge than reactivity. As LMA students learn to deconstruct movements through observation and analysis, multiple layers of learning emerge. My approach to teaching guides a process of questioning perceptions, digesting intellectual concepts, confronting the emotional meaning of movement, and examining behavior and expression. Students become skilled in viewing movement

as “neutral” (separate from meaning) and more informed about personal expression and interpretation. Holding this duality while exploring the personal meaning-making of a phrase or action requires deconstruction and integration using kinesthetic inquiry. Knowledge is gained “learning with the body”—sinking into a non-verbal world where sensation meets thoughts, feelings, and images. The physical experiences in LMA training can transform a person’s expressive movement range and build fine and gross motor skills. The intellectual content presented in LMA concentrates on how to “observe” movement while developing the ability to speak and listen from the body.

Mind-body learning and kinesthetic inquiry are aspects of body knowledge that are fundamental to my teaching. If we accept the view that body knowledge carries generalizations drawn from our own embodied experience, more questions about bodily learning arise:

1. How do people come to identify these embodied experiences?
2. What methods and approaches do we use as teachers to foster body knowledge?

Cultivating Body Knowledge

Not all students enter the domain of embodied experience easily. If someone is not a dancer or an athlete, learning from the body may be strange and unfamiliar. This is where the somatic disciplines are very helpful. During LMA training, students learn how to attend to thoughts and feelings through subjective exploration. Thomas Hanna defines this subjective information realm as somatics²—the body perceived from within a first-person viewpoint. This subjective process builds awareness and encourages open exploration in a receptive, liminal state.³ Somatic practice starts with focus on sensory awareness and attention to the body's inner perceptions.⁴ This way of "sensing" is but a threshold to body knowledge.

Body knowledge is not merely a physical skill, but a perceptual process that involves the mind, feelings and sensory-motor systems. Moore (2009, p. 110) explains that according to Laban's theory, "Physical movement from place to place occurs in the visible outer domain of space. Psychological shifts from mood to mood occur in the inner domain of thought and feeling but can be inferred from the dynamic manner in which an action is performed." I believe body knowledge is a psychophysical learning fundamental to training in several disciplines, including somatics,⁵ dance/movement therapy, and LMA.

Just as intellectual knowledge is developed through the study of ideas, theories, and concepts, body knowledge is developed through sensory awareness, movement experiences, and psychophysical investigations. Body knowledge begins with sensorial perceiving and thinking intertwined with conscious self-reflection. Somatic awareness is then linked to movement awareness, exploring a wide variety of movement qualities using LMA.

Our sensory-motor system enables us to feel (sense) and to respond (move). The overlapping process of sensing, feeling, and moving gives rise to feelings, thoughts, and images felt in and informed by the body. In this way, the body and movement inform consciousness.⁶ Dance/movement therapist Blanche Evan speaks of "re-educating the body to a state wherein movement responses function" (in Bernstein, 1995, p. 42), and dance/movement therapist Bonnie Bernstein (1995) talks about mobilizing "the dynamic interaction between psyche and the

body" to facilitate healing from trauma (p. 42). Dance therapists work with the body and psychophysical principles to restore health. They draw on body knowledge as an inroad to the healing journey by actively inviting movement responses, not just sensing.

Back to Basics

Developing body knowledge can be easy for some and difficult for others. Where to begin? Over the years, I have evolved a teaching process aligned to four stages of body knowledge development. I approach the classroom as a place for qualitative exploration and multiple styles of learning. I invite students to make up their own movements, rather than following a set dance routine. I advocate personal expression, guide improvisation, use role-playing to enact characters, and invite play and laughter. It is imperative for students to feel they are in a non-judgmental environment, free to explore and find new ways of moving and feeling.

In the first stage of body knowledge, the emphasis is on awareness of the body, sensations, and perception focused on the subjective inner life—getting grounded in the non-verbal realm, generating a "felt-sense." The next stage is moving and observing movements using the principles and terminology of LMA. The third stage is recognizing how another's movement may trigger a response in the observer (self). The fourth stage is establishing a mode of inquiry based on kinesthetic empathy⁷ with another person/mover. (See chart, "A Pedagogy for Cultivating Body Knowledge.")

All four stages of body knowledge are incorporated into my classes. To convey LMA concepts, I use creative movement exercises, dance improvisation, and somatics exercises. Students attune kinesthetically by investigating the bodily felt experience of moving with oneself and with others. Blending LMA and body knowledge builds an understanding of how another feels through following and observing that person's movements. I encourage self-reflection using mirroring and attuning to another's movement quality. In this way, *kinesthetic empathy* is cultivated with body knowledge.

Educating the Psyche in Motion

Psychological investigation through moving is integral to my LMA classes, but not forced. Learning body knowl-

edge can evoke thoughts and feelings. However, LMA is not therapy; LMA is educational. Learning encompasses sensing, feeling, and moving while students gain awareness, insight, and knowledge.

People need to be open and to feel safe to investigate the psychophysical process of moving. You cannot teach body knowledge and ask adults to reflect on their inner subjective sensations or perceptions if there is fear and restriction. As dance educator Alma Hawkins (1991, pp. 11-12) points out, "The feeling of fear, arising out of concern about being right and meeting expectations of others, blocks our ability to respond intuitively." Furthermore, she says that "lack of trust . . . makes it difficult, if not impossible, to be open to the experience and allow the inner impulse to guide the movement event." By encouraging play, using music, and modeling expressive movement, I attempt to create a relaxed atmosphere to facilitate an open state of consciousness.

Stage One

My first step in teaching body knowledge is to develop body awareness. I start this process by concentrating on the inward sensations of the body. For example, I may ask students to close their eyes and feel the rise and fall in their chest and belly while inhaling and exhaling. This process of inward attention is similar to mindfulness practices, e.g. meditation, somatics, or yoga.⁸ Slowing down and dropping into the body increases sensitivity to the inner world of feelings and thoughts that arise from moment to moment.⁹ In Stage One, inward attention may evoke memories, fantasies, or new imagery. According to Peggy Hackney (1998, p. 3), "Our bodies contain knowledge which is not accessible by ordinary linear intellectual probing. Moving, and a willingness to perceive the movement, brings access to bodily knowledge—particularly the feelingful connection between thoughts." She describes this first step of bodily knowledge as a pre-conscious merging in which there is an ability to know directly from the body. "It is an almost cellular knowledge—grounded and made vital through moving" (p. 27).

In Stage One of body knowledge, students become more comfortable with the felt-sense of self. I guide awareness but do not attempt to treat, heal, or offer psychological interpretations.

Stage Two

Learning to observe and identify movement while moving and staying connected to inner felt-sense is the next stage in developing body knowledge. Here the emphasis of training is on moving, seeing, and describing movement qualities with clarity and in detail. LMA concepts are used both to create the movement experiences and to provide a language for description with respect to:

1. Shape (the quality of how the body forms itself in space),
2. Space (the orientation and trace-forms within the kinesphere),
3. Effort (the motion qualities of weight, time, flow and focus), and
4. Body (the connectivity patterns within the body).¹⁰

In Stage Two, using specific terms to describe movement as well as movement symbols enables students to communicate clearly about observations and the phenomenon of movement.

Stage Three

After learning how to observe movement with the LMA framework (Shape, Space, Effort, Body), students become aware of how another's movement triggers their own responses and reactions in the way of thoughts, images, bodily sensations, and emotions. In this stage, body knowledge becomes more complex as students are challenged to attend to their own inner sensations while perceiving/experiencing another's movements. Students develop the capacity to indwell and attend to their own judgments and their own ascribed interpretations arising from personal bodily sensations. This type of self-reflective consciousness (bringing the unattended unconscious to consciousness) is known as *body reaction/body prejudice*.¹¹ In the field of dance therapy, this is known as somatic counter-transference. In the field of dance ethnology, it may be described as the cultural conditioning of movement meaning.

When the concept of body prejudice is first encountered, it can take time to identify. Adults carry their unconscious history within their bodies, and for that reason, I do not expect everyone to move in the same way or to discover body knowledge/body prejudice quickly. The body is a place that houses defenses. Thus, I am respectful when asking students to recognize how they hold and express them physically. I convey that defenses are a positive

attribute, to be recognized and understood.

Stage Four

The final stage of body knowledge involves establishing kinesthetic empathy¹² and using it in a mode of *continuous kinesthetic empathic inquiry*. This entails:

1. Participating with another's movement/sensory experience—the sensory-felt dimensions within the observer (kinesthetic empathy),
2. Analyzing bodily communications of another using the language of movement (LMA), and
3. Asking the mover questions about the meaning of his/her movements.

By learning how to observe another's movements, students become familiar with ways to describe the mover's actions. Having a neutral language for describing movement avoids projecting interpretation. For example, the observer may state that s/he sees the mover enclosing and shrinking the space around her/him with a delicate and slow control. S/he does not say, "I see you looking scared." Asking questions using a descriptive movement vocabulary allows the mover to be witnessed, reflected, and seen. The mover, not the observer, then fills in the meaning-making information.

Having a descriptive movement vocabulary that conveys movement quality and expression is key to the non-judgmental perspective of continuous kinesthetic empathic inquiry. As dance ethnologist Deidre Sklar (1994, p. 30) reminds us, "Movement is always an immediate corporeal experience. . . . To 'move with' people whose experience one is trying to understand is a way 'to feel' with them." In dance/movement therapy, Stage Four of body knowledge is at the core of Authentic Movement: "The discipline of Authentic Movement concerns a mover's longing to be seen by an outer witness, and the longing of a witness to see a mover" (Adler, 2007, p. 260).

Kinesthetic empathy is an attribute that must be embodied by the mover to begin the process of continuous kinesthetic empathic inquiry with others. Practicing empathic inquiry leads to less judgmental and more receptive interpretations of movement meaning. Adult students grow and change while experiencing this four-stage process of body knowledge in a movement education setting.

Reflections

Studying LMA can increase movement comprehension, expression, and observation. Body knowledge and kinesthetic empathy are also cultivated through my pedagogy. I structure classes to enhance perception, psychophysical knowledge, intuitive knowledge, and greater refinement of *kinesthetic awareness*. I teach adults in a dance studio, moving in relationship with others. Individuals experience psychological insights, expand their expressive movement range, and describe a general feeling of being more connected to their bodies and full selves. Students reveal positive emotional changes and express feelings of gratitude, as if discovering a lost part of themselves.

Over my long teaching career, I have observed many go through significant changes and experiences while learning LMA. This process has brought me to question: What happens to our sensory-motor, cognitive-emotional learning as adults? There is little research on the importance, effects, or influence of body knowledge on adults. Drawing from the fields of psychology and attachment theory, research shows that as infants and children, what we experience through sensorial patterns of communication and expressive interaction actually shapes our conceptual capacity. The growth of human intelligence is both a sensory-motor and a social process. The child's mind and body develop simultaneously and only in relationship with other human beings (Siegel, 1999).

In the past, it was believed that changes in the brain were only possible during infancy and childhood. However, more recent scientific research on brain plasticity shows that the brain is capable of altering existing pathways and even creating new ones. This gives rise to more questions for me as an LMA educator:

- What happens in the body/mind relationship as we mature?
- Does the growth of human intelligence still have a relationship to the sensory motor process?
- Are there stages to psychophysical learning for adults?
- Does enhanced awareness of movement, range, and expression lay down new neural pathways in the adult brain and promote health?
- What is the most effective way to educate for body knowledge?
- Is there any common pedagogy with the fields of LMA, dance/move-

ment therapy, somatics, somatic psychology, and body psychotherapy?

New Horizons

Learning LMA can nurture body knowledge in multiple ways. Viewing body knowledge as an educational process allows it to become a source for cultivating intelligence, consciousness, and kinesthetic empathy. Body knowledge is acquired through mind-body learning, has numerous stages, and reveals that movement is a corporeal way of knowing self and others throughout our lifespan.

By defining the stages of body knowledge and articulating how we facilitate psychophysical learning, we can investigate how to be most effective with our pedagogy. We are living in a

world where everyone has less opportunity to move, modern tools are virtual rather than physical (computers versus hammers), and embodied wisdom is lacking. What kind of movement education do we need? Imagine the outcomes of a new educational system in which:

- All schools foster movement learning as part of general education.
- Students participate in daily movement classes designed to promote creativity and problem solving with others.
- Value is placed on self-understanding, cultivating empathy and compassion for others despite differences, and dancing with joy.

Body knowledge is something we all need, and the time has come to move it out into the public domain. ☸

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A Pedagogy For Cultivating Body Knowledge			
	Key Concept	Objective(s)	Training Focus
STAGE ONE	Kinesthetic awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be receptive to personal/subjective somatic information/responses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn to focus on concrete, corporeal (somatic) experiences. • Recognize immediate sensory clues/information & kinesthetic responses to cultivate a conscious felt-sense of body.
STAGE TWO	Movement observation/analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn to move & observe a broad range of movement qualities & features. • Stay connected to inner responses while moving with others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move the LMA qualities to increase movement repertoire. • Expand movement vocabulary & plasticity of movement expression. • Learn to observe Shape, Space, Efforts, Body. • Describe movement features using LMA terminology and symbols.
STAGE THREE	Body reaction/prejudice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify how another's movement triggers one's own responses/reactions. • Develop self-reflective consciousness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain awareness of body states & feelings while perceiving/experiencing another's movements. • Develop the capacity to indwell & attend to the movement meaning.
STAGE FOUR	Continuous kinesthetic empathic inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish kinesthetic empathy. • Become aware of how sensory experiences form perceptions & cognition. • Develop bodily memory to hold onto & remember sensorial/kinesthetic experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate with another's movement/sensory experience (kinesthetic empathy). • Attend "with" & "to" the body in surroundings that include the "embodied" presence of others. • Witness others moving. • Verbally describe the movement of another using the language of movement. • Question the meaning of another's movement. • Share perceptions of the felt dimensions of the witness's experience.

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Notes

1. For an overview of the Laban Movement Analysis system, see Hackney (1998, pp. 217-229).
2. Thomas Hanna (1987) was the first person to give critical thought and development to the term *somatics*, and he established *Somatics: Magazine-Journal of the Mind/Body Arts and Sciences*, which continues to publish articles on the subjective experience of body/movement exploration. Accord-

ing to Hanna, first-person observation of the soma (Greek for body) is immediately factual. The proprioceptive centers communicate and continually feed back a rich display of somatic information that is immediately self-observed as a process that is both unified and ongoing.

3. The liminal state is characterized by ambiguity, openness, and indeterminacy. One's sense of identity dissolves to some extent, bringing about disorientation. Liminality is a period of transition, during which normal limits to thought, self-understanding, and behavior are relaxed, opening the way to something new.

4. Hirasawa (2011, p. 8) explains how sensing from within her body has helped her connect with her inner perceptions: "I have learned to simply notice my own senses and feelings, and have come to accept my inner experiences as they are. The practice of being mindful of my bodily experiences has allowed me to become more aware of what is happening in my body . . . and also enabled me to trust my inner experiences."

5. According to Hirasawa, (2011, p. 10), "Somatic education can help one to become conscious about habitual and unconscious processes, and also can enable one to reorient a sense of self at multiple levels—physiological, biological, and psychological—by reconnecting with one's sensory experiences and improving functioning of the sensory-motor system."

6. Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen wrote about this process of "sensing, feeling, and action" in more detail in her seminal Body-Mind Centering work in the 1970s (Cohen, 1993, pp. 63-65).

7. Daniel Goleman (1995) identifies self-reflective consciousness as crucial to the accurate development of empathy. Mary Gordon (2009, p. xv) further describes the structural and emotional context of kinesthetic empathy: "Driven (initially) by mirror neurons that permit us to enact behavioral imitation and emotional simulation, we move and feel in ways that reflect what we see in someone else. It is this openness to our own embodied response that creates the foundation for feeling another's feeling."

8. These disciplines all share body focusing methods with attention on consciousness, which I believe is a foundation of body knowledge. When I teach LMA, I also want this focus. However, LMA is a subject of learning, not a



Judy Gantz, MA, CMA

practice or therapy.

9. This first stage of body knowledge shares the inward focusing of various mind-body disciplines (e.g., meditation, somatics, and yoga). In this respect, each of these disciplines shares a body-centered approach to learning using body knowledge.

10. For more information on the theory and principles of connectivity patterns, see Hackney (1998, pp. 11-50).

11. Moore (1988, p. 88) uses the image of the "Ladder of Abstraction" as a way of understanding body knowledge/body prejudice: "The world-view we hold is often unconscious. When it comes to interpreting movement behavior, we travel up the Ladder of Abstraction automatically, often without even knowing that we have strayed from the concrete world of visceral experience into an abstract universe of symbols. What results (from) linking concrete perception with abstract interpretation is body knowledge and body prejudice."

12. For psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut (1959, p. 398), empathy is a form of "observation attuned to the 'inner' life of man" that is both a process of psychological investigation and a mode of affective responsiveness and bonding.