

EXPLORING THE MODERN DANCE TECHNIQUE CLASS  
AS A SOMATIC PRACTICE

by

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: Exploring the Modern Dance Technique Class as a Somatic Practice

This movement project investigates principles of modern dance technique and pedagogical practices which emphasize the inherently somatic nature of dance. Through designing, implementing, and evaluating an experimental modern dance technique course, my research considers: how dance can be inherently somatic, how teaching dance as a somatic practice differs from authoritarian dance pedagogy, and how implementing a somatic teaching philosophy affected my teaching strategies and practices.

The catalyst for this project emanates from the personal belief that dance is somatic. The overarching aim of the experimental course was to promote deeper embodiment and ownership of modern dance experiences. Delineating principles of modern dance technique and somatic practices supported the development of course goals which emphasize the inherently somatic nature of dance.

Themes of somatic dance pedagogy emerged: honoring student perspective in learning; process, mindfulness, and movement dialogue; language; repetition; and dedicated time. The somatic practice of modern dance technique is illustrated.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

In looking at common definitions of dance, the use of words such as move, movement, and motion are apparent. These words carry a certain meaning that help us to understand that dance is momentary and made up of the action or process of expressing change in the body or its parts. The time-based nature of the dance art form makes describing the inside of a dancer's experience a challenge. The way one dancer experiences motion can vary greatly from another dancer's approach to the same movement. Ideas centered on how to approach a dance movement or style of moving could be described as a technique, a practice, or a way of doing. In considering the development of dance techniques, and particularly those that fall under the idiom of modern dance, we can find a multitude of ways to approach modern dance movement.

As a teacher, performer, choreographer, and overall enthusiast of modern dance, I am often asked, "What is modern dance?" I find the answer to this question is not easily summed up in one sentence. Focusing on the aims, objectives, and goals of the modern dance technique class may help clarify its definition. As students work to hone their modern dance skills within the dance technique class, further questions centered on what technique is often arise. Is it the acquisition of skills which classifies technique? The meaning of technique seems to evolve along with modern dance. While some may use the word technique to classify dance into categories and steps, or the "what," I am drawn to understanding technique through the "how" of movement. The how of dance movement may be further understood through intentions or principles that inform the movement.

Modern dance techniques have historically been steeped in principles which support aesthetic and choreographic choices. For example, in describing the technique of Martha Graham, Joan Cass states,

Exercises emphasized the torso as the emotional center, with movements stemming from pelvis and lower back and traveling outward to arms, legs and head. Percussive beats, uneven phrasing, and twisted shapes all conveyed internal discord. However, many of the exercises and the daily class ritual were built on phrases that Martha had put together in past performances of choreography. Exercises were not therefore designed systematically to stretch and strengthen all the parts of the body. Rather, they were designed to train dancers to move in Martha Graham's personal style. (1993, 264)

The pelvis is also a point of focus in the Erick Hawkins technique. Beverly Brown explains in Hawkins technique the pelvis is considered the center of gravity and movement (Brown n.d). She states, “[I]n order to find stable, integrated and efficient movement, you need to experience the pelvis as the center of energy and control, while the legs, arms, and the whole spine (especially the neck and head) are experienced as weights controlled by and constantly relating back to that pelvic center (Brown n.d, 40).”

I have come to realize, through my own experiences, the practice of the modern dance technique class has for me been a process of developing and polishing my ability to understand underlying physical and theoretical intentions of movement in preparation for performance. Through this process I have sought ease and efficiency in the embodiment of modern dance principles that could prepare me for a variety of movement styles and activities. This process has required me to work in a focused manner while engaging with the experience of the movement.

This way of approaching my dance training has evolved through working in a variety of learning environments. In many of my early learning experiences I felt the need to create the correct external image of the dance, and could only be sure I had

reached that image through external verification of a mirror, or more commonly the teacher's critique or approval. During these learning experiences, I had very little trust in my internal sensations, kinesthetic sense, or my perception of movement experiences. This was especially troubling in performance. It was sometimes difficult to feel that my internal experiences related to the external feedback I would receive from a director or choreographer.

Through my desire to improve my awareness and combat injuries, I have turned to a variety of somatic practices over the years. I have felt more aware of my structure and places of held tension as a result of these practices, and I started to wonder how working from sensation in my dance technique classes may help my ability to be a more aware and efficient mover, perceptive of my experiences. As a certified Pilates instructor and mentor to teachers in training, I became aware of the possibility of approaching this work, and ultimately any form of movement, in a mindful and somatic manner. As a dancer in a professional modern dance company, I started seeking opportunities to practice my technique and performances with deeper connection of mind and body to the moment of movement. I became aware of the process of movement as I dialogued with my experiences. Through this curiosity, I began to realize dance could be more than "correct" and "incorrect" ways of achieving movement. My interest shifted from the end product of the movement to the process of the movement. This shift meant I was becoming more reliant on my internal experiences and sensations as a source of authority for knowing and evaluating my movement experience. I began to make choices about "how" I approached movement, which helped me find ownership of my dance

experiences. I became more aware of dancing in the present moment and began to develop the belief that dance can be inherently somatic.

As a result of my own experiences in applying a somatic philosophy to my dance training, I became interested in how I could pass this on to my students through my teaching. I wanted to help students find ownership and deeper embodiment of their own somatic dance experiences. I wondered how this focus would affect, and possibly change, my teaching practices. I proposed a movement project study that would provide me with the opportunity to consider and apply pedagogical practices which support this philosophy in a modern dance technique class. This allowed me to research, design, implement, and evaluate possibilities for teaching modern dance technique as a somatic practice.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this movement project was to investigate principles of modern dance technique and pedagogical practices which may emphasize the inherently somatic nature of dance. Through designing, implementing, and evaluating an experimental modern dance technique course, I was able to consider the following:

- How can dance be inherently somatic?
- How does teaching modern dance as a somatic experience differ from authoritarian dance pedagogy practices?
- How will implementing a somatic teaching philosophy affect my teaching strategies and practices as I work towards facilitating somatic dance inquiry in a modern dance technique class?

The overarching aim of this modern dance technique class was to promote deeper embodiment and ownership of somatic modern dance experiences. Understanding principles of modern dance technique and somatic practices supported the development of course goals focused on emphasizing the inherently somatic nature of dance in this experimental modern dance technique course.

### **Definition of Terms**

During this movement project there were a number of terms I felt were necessary to define. The following discussion of terms aims to demonstrate the frequent interconnectedness of these terms. The defined terms are italicized and appear in the following order:

- Dance Technique
- Somatics
- Holistic Experience
- Self
- Somatic Approach
- Mindful
- Bodily Experience
- Intention, Intent
- Embody, Embodiment
- Attention
- Attentional Practices
- Awareness
- Internal Authority
- Ownership

Defining *dance technique* is not an easy task. At best it is an ongoing process as modern dance classes are continually evolving. Not only do teachers struggle to agree on one definition of dance technique, they also struggle to identify the purpose and core principles of the modern dance technique class. Definitions of dance technique could include: a codified system of dance, proper execution of specific movements, the



manifestation of an aesthetic, an individual's dance skill abilities, and a wide range of skills and methods of motor development that can be applied to any dance style (Barr 2009). Due to varying approaches of teachers to the dance technique class, definitions of dance technique vary greatly among students (Barr 2009). A common goal of the dance technique class, for both students and teachers, is improvement and progress (Barr 2009). This goal makes defining dance technique even more difficult since improvement and progress are difficult to understand and measure. What is improved upon and how is progress measured?

Finding a consensus on the definition of dance technique among teachers is difficult, which I have personally experienced in graduate pedagogy seminar class discussions at the University of Oregon. With this in mind, I have come to appreciate the student perspective in defining dance technique. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, I define dance technique as a way of doing and experiencing dance as a mover. This definition of dance technique looks beyond the "what," or the steps of dance, to the "how," or the way in which the movement is produced and experienced. By focusing on the "how" of the dance movement, this definition points to the importance of the student's experience of the movement and values the student's individual approach to understanding and producing dance movement while bringing attention to the moment of movement. Dance technique is one's method or way of approaching, strategizing both physically and mentally, and embodying dance movement.

The term *somatics*, from the Greek word soma, was developed by Thomas Hanna in 1970 to refer to the whole person, the body in its entirety (Batson and IADMS 2009). A somatic practice is one that unifies body, mind, spirit, and environment (Fitt 1996) into

a *holistic experience* – one which focuses on the interconnected parts of the self as a whole. The *self* is one’s fundamental existence and entire being that differentiates one person from another. Martha Eddy identifies three branches of somatics: somatic psychology, somatic bodywork, and somatic movement (Eddy 2009). Dance professionals frequently utilize somatic movement practices as cross-training in support of their dancing. Somatic movement practices facilitate self-knowing by heightening sensory and motor awareness (Eddy 2009), while also supporting curiosity and embracing the mystery of the unknown and unexplained (Goodnight 2008). Somatic movement practices have historically developed from applying theoretical, scientific, and objective knowledge of the human body to practical and subjective movement-based experiences (Eddy 2009; ISMETA website 2013; Johnson 1986). Although at times this movement project made note of somatics as a field of practices which promote holistic knowing of the self, ultimately I use the term somatic in this movement project to consider what it means to approach dance somatically, as a holistic movement experience. Therefore, this study considers a *somatic approach* to be one which emphasizes a mindful focusing of one’s attention in present moment experiences, seeking a unified understanding of body, mind, spirit, and environment. To be *mindful* is to be conscious – attentive and aware – of internal and external occurrences in the present moment without judgment or analysis (Holzel et al. 2011; Brown, Ryan, & Creswell 2007). When speaking of the body, the mind is inherently present. Therefore, a *bodily experience* is inclusive of the mind, spirit, and our relationship with our surroundings.

An *intention* is a desire to proceed in a certain way, placing focus on a preferred idea, process, or outcome. It is a determination, purpose, or focus where attention is

placed. Peggy Hackney delineates *intent* as one of the twelve principles of Bartenieff Fundamentals (1998). Intent is the constituent which “organizes the neuromuscular system” (Hackney 1998, 39). Hackney states, “Clarity of intent enables the body to find the motor pattern to fulfill the intent (1998, 43).”

To *embody* is to give perceivable form to an idea or intention through the process of experiencing the doing. *Embodiment* is the act of embodying, which is a life long process of awakening to many aspects of bodily experiences. In dance, embodiment involves the ability to perform movement consciously to one’s fullest potential, with “a sense of beingness in the here-and-now” (Warburton 2011, 68). Embodiment is not only associated with the body, but the mind as well (Warburton 2011). This study investigated methods of facilitating embodiment, placing emphasis on the experience of having a personal dialogue with the movement, rather than through a model which places emphasis on controlling the body (Goodnight 2008). “Embodied knowledge, knowledge which comes from doing, experiencing, and attending to internal sensations, can help people find connections which lead to healing, or self-understanding (Goodnight 2008, 39).” According to Caroline Goodnight, somatic practitioner Glenna Batson believes transformational, embodied experiences are a result of bringing attention to the self (Goodnight, 2008).

*Attention* deals with directing or concentrating the mind. Rudolf von Laban noted intention and attention, along with decision making, are part of an inner preparation process which can result in body expression (Moore 2009). Movement exploration and exercises which focus attention to sensing, intention, and awareness of one’s surroundings can be labeled as *attentional practices*, a term used to describe the practice

of dance improvisation by Kent De Spain (2003). Learning to focus one's attention can lead to heightened *awareness*, "the conscious registration of stimuli, including the five physical senses, the kinesthetic senses, and the activities of the mind. Awareness is our direct, most immediate contact with reality" (Brown, Ryan, and Creswell 2007, 212). Self-awareness is an important building block in formulating one's embodied knowledge and can lead to enhanced internal authority (Goodnight 2008).

*Internal authority* indicates having personal autonomy (Goodnight 2008). It is a term often used by somatics practitioners to describe an expected learner outcome which transpires from the empowerment of students (Goodnight 2008). Focus is placed on internal self-organization of movement and fulfillment rather than external expectations or values, such as teachers' cues or the use of the mirror (Batson and IADMS 2009). Development of internal authority can occur through attention to self, understanding movement intentions, embodied practices or self-explorations, empowerment of the individual as a source of knowing (Goodnight 2008), and through intertwining theoretical knowledge with practice. Greater self-awareness can lead to internal authority and ultimately to a sense of self ownership (Goodnight 2008).

*Ownership* indicates a personal connection to and involvement with one's movement experiences. A student's ability to find ownership of his/her dance technique experiences may be dependent upon the learning environment, as well as the attitude of the student (Barr 2009). Opportunities for transformation are revealed through the availability, openness, and willingness of students to both receive and seek information. Finding ownership requires students to take responsibility for their learning through

setting goals, observation, and researching movement sensations and intentions (Fortin, Long, and Lord 2002).

### **Delimitations**

This research focused on the process of considering how and when the modern dance technique class can be practiced somatically, and how I as a teacher could promote this option through my teaching. Due to the limited length of the course and frequency of the class sessions, it was deemed that this project would focus less on actual student outcomes or the affect of this class on dance training. Instead the focus of this project was delimited to understanding principles, practices, and strategies which support the somatic practice of modern dance technique through the design and implementation of an experimental modern dance technique course. This course acted as a laboratory for the application and practice of somatic dance pedagogy. The evaluation process for this project was primarily aimed at considering my progress in developing as a facilitator of somatic dance pedagogy. Therefore, video documentation during this project was intended to create a record of the classes that would be reviewed in evaluating my development as a facilitator, rather than for consideration of student progress. Principles of modern dance technique were distilled primarily through considering my personal modern dance training experiences and principles of somatics were delineated through the literature review.

## **Limitations**

There were frequent participant absences throughout the course for various personal reasons. The course involved 12 participants, but not all participants were present for each session. One of the eight sessions was cut short due to participant and self involvement with a University of Oregon dance performance. Due to technological difficulties, Session 1 and part of Session 2 were not video recorded. Some discussions were difficult to capture since the video camera was set up to be as unobtrusive as possible throughout class sessions, which meant capturing low-level sounds was difficult at times.

## **Significance of Study**

Many studies have looked at incorporating or integrating somatic practices or activities into the dance technique class (Diaz 2006; Eddy 2009; Eddy 2006; Fortin, Long, Lord 2002; Kearns 2010). Recent studies have also begun to consider what it means to incorporate somatic principles into dance training (Burnidge 2012; Lobel and Brodie 2004).

This movement project considers how core principles of somatic practices have been previously incorporated into dance, while further investigating how modern dance technique can be approached as a somatic practice by unveiling and enhancing that which already exists in modern dance technique which makes it somatic. It is based on the belief that dance is inherently somatic, and the process of understanding modern dance movement intentions is somatic. To be somatic in this study is therefore not dependent on specific movements, but is rather dependent upon involvement with those movements.

It is involvement of the mind and body in the “how,” through focusing on core somatic and modern dance principles, which can make modern dance technique somatic.

More formal research is needed to help understand the outcomes and benefits of linking dance teaching with somatic practices. Although benefits to incorporating somatics into dance training have been noted (Batson 2007; Brodie & Lobel 2004; Burnidge 2012; Daniels 2009; Eddy 2009; Eddy 2006; Geber & Wilson 2010), the study of somatics is still often only considered a supportive adjunct to dance training (Batson and IADMS 2009). Dance has been traditionally taught from a hierarchical approach in a teacher-centered authoritarian environment, where the acquisition of correct skill execution is emphasized (Daniels 2009). Students often learn through imitation and external feedback in this model, leaving them with a desire for external approval (Daniels 2009). In my experience, this traditionally authoritarian model, which places emphasis on a “right” and “wrong” way of executing skills, can produce fear of failure and ultimately a fear of trying. As dance has evolved into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, dancers are asked to be versatile, witty, and thoughtful – requiring a shift from focusing on training bodies as instruments to training artists as whole selves (Daniels 2009, Geber and Wilson 2010). Approaching the modern dance technique class as an inherently somatic practice may provide a model which can support a shift to a learner-centered approach.

This study is significant because it lays the foundation to investigate how practicing dance as a somatic experience may reveal a pedagogical model which promotes embodiment and may enhance internal authority, potentially addressing the demands placed on dancers today. The dance community seems to have an innate understanding of what is meant by the embodiment of movement; however, combined

fields of study may assist in developing the language necessary to better understand this term (Batson and IADMS 2009; Warburton 2011). The goal of embodiment is central to dance and somatics. Descriptive language from dance and somatic training perspectives could further reveal what it means to be an embodied dancer, as well as how this can be achieved.

This movement project has been personally significant in contributing to my pedagogical development and teaching philosophy. This study has provided me with the framework to understand the role of the facilitator and to grow as a teacher of dance experiences which aim to promote education of the whole self.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

Practitioners of dance have supplemented dance training with somatic practices for years. In fact, courses in somatics were being taught at the American Dance Festival as early as 1969 (Nettl-Fiol 2008). Over time, somatic practices have become a staple in many dancers' training practices and dancers have frequently led the development of many somatic techniques, particularly those classified as somatic movement techniques (Eddy 2009).

Dancers have often used somatic practices as a separate supportive role to find ease, efficiency, and an approach to minimizing tension or stress in movements (Geber and Wilson 2010). In an interview with Rebecca Nettl-Fiol in 2002, Martha Myers describes somatic work as experiential, requiring the investigation of present moment experiences, which similarly to dance, can be difficult to fully express and appreciate verbally (Nettl-Fiol 2008). Myers explains somatic practices “deal with subtleties of individual movement, deepening awareness – the critical ability to sense and respond to micro-movement of the soma. The aim is to ‘unravel’ ... old habitual neuromuscular patterns, and replace them with new, more efficient ones” (Nettl-Fiol 2008, 90). The ephemeral nature of dance performance places emphasis on the dancer's ability to respond in the moment (Shultz 2005). Dancers, therefore, often practice somatic techniques with the goal of becoming embodied movers, capable of being “receptive and responsive to the moment of movement” (Batson and IADMS 2009, 2).

In reviewing the literature, I have found in some instances practitioners consider the relationship between dance and somatics to be beneficial, supplemental, and at times influential, but their approaches indicate a separation of these fields (Diaz 2006; Eddy 2009). Some models utilize specific somatic techniques or exercises as the class warm-up (Kearns 2010). Others identify and integrate principles of somatics into the technique class in an effort to move beyond the dance training focus of end product, to a focus on the process of fulfilling movement potential (Brodie and Lobel 2004; Fortin, Long, and Lord 2002; Burnidge 2012).

The following review of literature is an interwoven look at relevant sources on the field and foundations of somatics, dance pedagogy practices, intersections between dance studies and somatics, and possible elements of a somatic approach to dance technique. This literature review has been a precursor to distilling principles of somatics, which are delineated later in this chapter for the purpose of better understanding how dance can be inherently somatic.

### **Somatics and Dance**

Don Hanlon Johnson, founder of the Somatics Program at California Institute of Integral Studies, explains the development of the somatics field has rested greatly on the fusing of theory and practice (Johnson 1986). He suggests somatic education should include the “study of law-abiding processes that are inherent in our bodies: genetic, neurophysiological, anatomical, physical, psychological, social, and spiritual” (Johnson 1986, 4). Johnson expresses his stance on unifying the field of somatics by focusing on underlying principles common to somatic practices, rather than focusing on individual

somatic techniques (1986). He identifies principles by considering how pioneers of somatics developed their work. While techniques are “what” somatic pioneers did in order to merely convey the fundamental purposes of their work, principles are the actual fundamental underpinnings of their work (Johnson 1986). Unifying principles Johnson identifies include developing sensitivity, which places emphasis on “refining one’s abilities to perceive both one’s inner environment and the subtleties of the outer world” (Johnson 1986, 4) and consideration of the objective versus the subjective body, which he refers to as the public versus the experienced body.

Martha Eddy also considers historical developments of somatic practices in discerning common features of early somatic practices (Eddy 2009). These commonalities include: focus on breath, floor work, listening to the body, finding bodily sensation, deepened awareness, ease and pleasure in movement, and a sense of moving self (Eddy 2009). She also identifies three branches of somatics – somatic psychology, somatic bodywork, and somatic movement – with the latter having been especially driven by dancers (Eddy 2009). Eddy suggests the affiliation of dance and somatics can strengthen the position of both areas of study in higher education. While neuro-science is helping to provide conceptual understanding of somatics, dance courses can provide a laboratory for understanding somatics through movement (Eddy 2009).

A 2008 study by Caroline Goodnight, at the University of Oregon, also provides support for the value of somatics in higher education. In her study, Goodnight interviewed seven well-respected authorities in the field of dance kinesiology and somatics: Glenna Batson, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Irene Dowd, Martha Eddy, Sally Fitt, Peggy Hackney, and Andrea Olsen. After she transcribed the recorded interviews,

she found ten themes emerged that described the value of these fields, which she classified into three major categories. The first category, *attitudinal approach*, is made up of three themes: *humbleness*, *embracing mystery*, and *honoring the internal perspective*. The second category, *practical strategies*, also includes three themes: *positive approach*, *attention*, and *experiential learning*. The third category, *expected learner outcomes*, includes four themes: *switching from a control to a dialogue model*, *movement efficiency*, *asking better questions*, and *internal authority* (Goodnight 2008). These categories and themes have potential to influence dance teachers and educators, beyond the realms of somatics and dance kinesiology, through practical application of these theoretical findings within the dance technique class. In addition, these findings provide support for a somatic philosophy of dance pedagogy.

Pamela Geber, dance faculty at University of Utah, and Margaret Wilson, dance faculty at University of Wyoming, also consider a combined somatic and scientific approach to teaching and learning about dance (2010). They state, “A combined scientific and somatic approach can offer dancers increased awareness of movement possibilities, and thus greater versatility” (Geber and Wilson 2010, 54). They further explain, “A blended scientific and somatic experience can provide dancers with ways to develop an embodied understanding of scientific concepts and language as understood through enhanced body awareness and knowledge” (Geber and Wilson 2010, 56).

Somatics can offer an avenue for embodying scientific knowledge by providing many levels of information that can be made accessible to dancers through a pedagogical shift towards experiential, non-hierarchical, and individualized teaching and learning

(Geber and Wilson 2010), which is referred to by Kathryn Daniels as learner-centered education (Daniels 2009). Daniels states,

Conceptual knowledge, deep perceptual awareness, and understanding of individual solutions are facilitated by a learner-centered pedagogical approach that encourages students to become thinking dancers who assume responsibility for their own growth and progress. Learner-centered education shifts the class focus from what the teacher knows to what the student understands, valuing the student's personal awareness and discoveries. It encourages active learning supported by self-reflection, accompanied by the self-cueing and self-direction essential to technical progress. (2009, 9)

This learner-centered model is the method Daniels utilizes in promoting whole person education in dance by providing students with four tools: “conceptual understanding of anatomically sound dance technique; refined perceptual awareness; knowledge and understanding of how to work with one's own body; and a strong sense of self” (Daniels 2009, 8). In dissecting the learner-centered model in dance, Daniels first considers traditional methods of teaching dance, which have typically been teacher-centered and hierarchical with students learning through external cues and demands based on the teacher's perspective. “Students trained in this model are generally motivated by their desire for external approval; they often become passive learners who excel at following instructions but lack internal awareness and motivation” (Daniels 2009, 8). Considering whole person education through a learner-centered model may encourage students to seek greater sensation, awareness, and ownership of their dance experiences, and may further assist in understanding dance somatically.

Susan Stinson discusses dance pedagogy in terms of what she describes as the “traditional technique class,” which she asserts is the “primary dance class taken by students” (Stinson 1993, 132). She explains,

In most dance technique classes, the teacher is the authority and the only recognized source of knowledge. All students face the teacher and a mirror, and the teacher often faces the mirror, too, seeing her students only as reflections. Interaction between students is frowned upon. The teacher's voice is expected to be the only one heard, except in the case of a well-focused question. The teacher tells and shows the students what to do and, in some classes, how to do it. Students attempt to replicate the movement done by the teacher. The teacher verbally gives what are called "corrections," to shape the students' performance of the movement more closely to the desired ideal. The students repeat the movement, and the teacher continues giving corrections until it is time to move on to the next sequence. Some teachers give directions and corrections that refer to internal sensation and artistic qualities, not just the mechanics of the movement. But in reality, most dance training consists of learning how to follow directions and how to follow them well. The model for traditional dance pedagogy seems to be the authoritarian father. (Stinson 1993, 132-133)

Stinson brings attention to the term traditional authoritarian dance pedagogy as she compares it to alternative methods such as, critical pedagogy, creative dance pedagogy, and finally to her summation of feminist pedagogy in dance, which is highly learner-centered and based on her beliefs that "authority is located with-in each individual, power should be shared... and caring is important" (Stinson 1993, 139). According to Kathryn Daniels, in a learner-centered environment, students develop "a strong sense of self, inner direction and self-esteem" which can help cultivate dancers that are capable of a variety of creative situations (Daniels 2009, 9).

At a time when cross-training, fusion, and demands of versatility have become the norm, dancers need to continue to train in ways that properly prepare themselves to fulfill movement vocabularies, while addressing cognitive and creative development. The dance technique class can act as an environment and a tool for educating and preparing the individual, as a whole, for a variety of dance experiences. Melanie Aceto states that she feels the purpose of modern dance technique "is to train the body to respond to a broad range of movement demands" (2012, 15). Aceto has approached these demands

through her Alteration Task methodology, a pedagogical model which challenges students' abilities to problem solve spontaneously through exploring changes to an original dance phrase by improvising (Alteration Tasks) with space, time, and energy cues (Aceto 2012). She has found this method stretches the scope of the dance technique class beyond replicating movement and the development of physical skills to include focus on development of critical thinking, performance quality, and artistic choices which can foster empowerment and ownership of movement material (Aceto, 2012).

Sylvie Fortin, Warwick Long, and Madeline Lord developed a dance technique class which also aimed to create opportunities for students to find ownership of their learning process (Fortin, Long, and Lord 2002). They specifically investigated how the Feldenkrais Method®, a form of somatic movement education, can inform contemporary dance technique classes. In their study they address “a shift in the dance culture that embraces self-awareness in dance practice” (Fortin, Long, and Lord 2002, 155). One method they employed to promote ownership of learning was by asking the students to bring attention to their own movement sensations. In considering his own learning process in dance, Long realized that his early difficulties in learning dance movement were profoundly influenced by his way of thinking about dance. He states,

In commencing dance classes at the age of eighteen, I found the learning process a struggle made more complex by my notions of right and wrong technique. These notions were based on my perceptions of an ideal dance technique and how I should look whilst doing it. Attention to sensation had escaped me. I was preoccupied with achieving technical perfection no matter what the cost. (Fortin, Long, and Lord 2002, 166)

Long was able to find that somatic and dance education are linked “through learning to direct attention to movement on an incrementally fine level” (Fortin, Long, and Lord 2002, 166).

Anne Burnidge also aims to encourage student ownership in learning through her somatically informed pedagogical philosophy. She discusses the application of somatic educational principles to dance while considering commonalities between somatic and feminist/democratic pedagogy (Burnidge 2012). Burnidge reflects on her own teaching evolution as she compares “traditional dance instruction” to “somatically influenced dance instruction” (Burnidge 2012). In the traditional model, dance instruction can be product oriented and teacher centered, emphasizing the objective view and external judge (Burnidge 2012). Traditional dance instruction can also have a dualistic world model, pointing out the right way of doing things, often by highlighting dancers that meet the teacher’s expectations as a model (Burnidge 2012). Burnidge states,

Dance often places the demands of external form over internal experiences and student needs, making the teacher the gatekeeper of the form with the power to externally judge a student and her body. This environment does not necessarily invite deep personal exploration and awareness. There are many wonderful dance teachers who work within the traditional class framework without abusing their position of power; however, the authority given to the teacher by the student and the art form puts the teacher in a situation where abuse of power is all too easy and prevalent. (2012, 44)

In a somatically influenced teaching model, dance instruction can be process oriented and student centered, placing value on the subjective view and internal judge. “By valuing and encouraging psychophysical integration of personal, somatic wisdom, the somatically informed instructor strives to cultivate an environment where students are no longer a passive recipient of information from the teacher, but have the agency to be active participants in their own learning” (Burnidge 2012, 43). Burnidge illuminates the importance of the learning environment. Outcomes of her somatically informed approach to teaching dance include enhanced dedication to learning and a higher “level and quality of student engagement with the material and with the learning community” (Burnidge



2012, 39). Focusing on the “how” of teaching and shifting towards a more egalitarian approach to teaching dance could create opportunities to practice dance somatically and provide viable alternatives to authoritarian-based dance pedagogy.

In a 2009 International Association for Dance Medicine and Science resource article, Glenna Batson writes, “Somatic education differs first from traditional dance pedagogy in its philosophical basis – that of dismembering mind-body dualism in pursuit of personal autonomy” (Batson and IADMS 2009, 1). This article highlights three key elements of somatic practices, which may also provide us with alternatives to traditional dance training. In the first component Batson discusses, Novel Learning Context, a learning context or environment is provided which emphasizes self-acceptance, exploration, and a freedom from holding patterns often created by traditional dance techniques (Batson and IADMS 2009). Batson states, “Instead of striving to perform the ‘right’ or ‘correct’ movement, the dancer learns to move from an embodied source – fully receptive and responsive to the moment of movement” (Batson and IADMS 2009, 2). The second concept is sensory attunement. Emphasizing sensory awareness in somatic practices is a way of focusing on the process or “how” of movement, versus the product or “what” of movement (Batson and IADMS 2009, 2). Sensory exploration can develop our ability to self-organize movement. One’s internal authority can become a reference for knowing and understanding dance. This may differ from traditional dance learning models, which frequently stress external feedback provided to students through mirrors and teachers’ cues (Batson and IADMS 2009). The third concept addressed, augmented rest, is rarely employed in the dance technique class. The use of rest phases in somatics “is designed to allow the nervous system time for processing and integration, and

physiological systems time to recover” (Batson and IADMS 2009, 2). Rest can also serve as a time for movement visualization, which can enhance motor learning (Batson and IADMS 2009).

Somatic techniques, versus principles, have been applied to dance in various ways. Lauren Kearns, professor of dance at Elon University, applied her knowledge of somatics in a curriculum development model, which focuses on developing dancers’ embodiment and quality of movement in the dance program at Elon through the inception of two levels of courses in somatics training (Kearns 2010). After implementing these classes, Kearns found a need for a class that directly linked the somatics practices to dance technique and performance. She established a class titled “Somatics in Action,” which included a 30 minute floor barre at the beginning of a 70 minute dance technique class. Kearns selected movements from four somatic techniques that she had experience with in determining the floor barre content: Pilates, Ideokinesis, Bartenieff Fundamentals, and Yoga (Kearns 2010). Following the floor barre, the technique class would progress to a center barre, traveling phrases, and a final phrase with application of the floor barre encouraged throughout. Progress was considered through teacher and self-evaluations, as well as peer critiques. The students were videotaped performing movement exams eight times throughout the semester (Kearns 2010), though it is unclear if the same movement phrase was repeated each time. This curriculum development model appears to have been developed by drawing on techniques, which Johnson refers to as the “what” of a method (Johnson 1986), rather than the underlying principles which are the foundation for the techniques. However, this study provides an example of one way somatic techniques are being integrated into the dance technique class. Kearns noted observing

significant improvements to the students' "approach to movement, mindfulness, and expressiveness" (Kearns 2010, 39) in class and performance, although it is unclear how this was measured or how she defines mindfulness.

In an article examining contributions of mindfulness to psychological well-being, Brown and Ryan define mindfulness as "the state of being attentive to and aware of what is taking place in the present" (Brown & Ryan 2003, 822). Mindfulness is essentially a state of consciousness, which stems from Buddhist traditions (Brown and Ryan 2003). The ability to be conscious may be enhanced through improving awareness of one's "inner and outer environment" and attention to specific experiences inside the field of awareness (Brown and Ryan 2003, 822). Brown, Ryan, and Creswell explain the practice of mindfulness entails a receptive state of mind, which is differentiated by unbiased, nonjudgmental, pre-analytical awareness of present moment events and experiences (Brown, Ryan, and Creswell 2007). "A Zen metaphor likens this state to that of a polished mirror, wherein the mind simply reflects what passes before it, unbiased by conceptual thought about what is taking place" (Brown, Ryan, and Creswell 2007, 213). Brown, Ryan, and Creswell further consider theoretical foundations that suggest mindfulness can have "psychological, somatic, behavioral, and interpersonal effects" (2007, 219). They point out the need for and challenges of future mindfulness-based research (Brown, Ryan, and Creswell 2007). The field of dance may have the potential to contribute to future research in mindfulness. Dance studies could contribute to understanding the practical application and practice of mindfulness, while dance education may also greatly benefit from the incorporation and investigation of possible mindfulness practices in dance training.

Rebecca Enghauser addresses the practice of mindfulness in dance, in drawing upon the work of Laura Sewell, an ecopsychologist (Enghauser 2007). Enghauser considers a somatic perspective in dance through an ecological lens in discussing her ecosomatic approach to dance pedagogy. This approach combines the focus of somatics with ecology, which considers the interrelationships between organisms with their surrounding environment (Enghauser 2007). Enghauser lists a number of important characteristics of her model, including that an ecosomatic approach emphasizes studying dance as an “intrinsically motivated mindful practice that stems from empowerment and somatic authority” (2007, 89). She states, “Ultimately, mindfulness in dance is when one’s entire being is fully present both in the dance class, and in performance” (Enghauser 2007, 83). To promote a mindful focusing of the students’ attention in the dance class, Enghauser outlines possible breathing exercises and recommends using a repeated movement sequence in the beginning of the dance class. She also advocates for using a partnered touch exercise in awakening attention to sensation, as well as exploratory improvisations and Authentic Movement ideas, as a way “to connect to the subjective, body-self stream of moving consciousness” (Enghauser 2007, 88).

Authentic Movement, an improvisational method of moving created by Mary Whitehouse, is most notably used as a form of movement therapy (Enghauser 2007). This practice usually involves moving from impulse with the eyes closed in an improvisational movement context, while another actively witnesses this movement experience. A post-movement communication process follows, which involves present tense, non-judgmental, descriptive language in a prescribed process shared by both the mover and the witness (Seereiter 2012). Mary Seereiter, practitioner and teacher of

Authentic Movement, states, “This entire process helps us to stay in direct connection to our experience, staying in the present. The process has the potential to help us see when we are projecting and when we are truly in the experience of the present” (2012, 5).

While Authentic Movement has been primarily a practice found in the realm of movement therapy, Enghauser suggests, “an authentic improvisation becomes a tool for the dancer to become familiar with oneself inside the moving moment, void of judgment” (Enghauser 2007, 88). This mindful knowing of oneself can build confidence in and awareness of a dancer’s somatic experiences and can be “a companion technical skill” worth developing in dance (Enghauser 2007, 88).

Julie Brodie and Elin Lobel focus on methods of integrating somatic principles into a dance technique class, rather than incorporating specific somatic movement techniques or exercises (Brodie and Lobel 2004). They developed a curriculum based on four fundamental principles they consider to be common to many forms of somatics: breathing, sensing, connecting, and initiating (Brodie and Lobel 2004). In determining these four principles, Brodie and Lobel considered the following recognized somatic practices: Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais Method, Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis, Body-Mind Centering, and Ideokinesis. Pilates was also mentioned as an influence. Based on footnotes to an elaborate reference list, it appears the four principles of somatics used in this study were arrived at through an extensive literature review. While working to integrate these principles into a dance technique course, the authors recommend focusing on only one principle each class session. Examples of how to begin class through exploratory activities, with specific focus on each of the four principles, are given in easy to follow tables. In order to fully integrate these principles into the dance

technique class, it is recommended the transition from exploratory exercises (often verbally led) to set movement exercise (often visually led) be handled with care (Brodie and Lobel 2004). For example, using a familiar, repeated phrase of movement at this transitioning point in the class is highly recommended for maintaining class flow (Brodie and Lobel 2004). Brodie and Lobel's model of integration may assist a student to apply principles learned in a separate somatics course to their dancing. Their curriculum design could also provide a means of introducing somatic principles in university programs where offering separate courses in somatic practices is not possible, addressing the issue of time constraints that many dance programs face (Brodie and Lobel 2004).

Johnson points out that in learning somatic principles, dedication of time to practice is necessary to fully embody somatic work (Johnson 1986). In speaking about somatic education, Johnson states, "If we really think our work is so important, why do we insist on taking so little time to learn it? In the absence of such a comprehensive education, there is no alternative but to imitate techniques created by others" (1986, 7). The same could be true in examining dance education. The "hurry-up and learn" mentality leaves little time for true discovery of rich embodied experiences in dance. This is an important consideration as dance departments not only look at how somatic methodologies fit into their programs, but also in balancing practical and theoretical course work in seeking a well-rounded approach to dance education in academia.

Johnson's endorsement of emphasizing principles over techniques in somatics has greatly impacted the conception of this movement project. He explains,

An education based on somatic principles aims at freedom. Learning techniques requires imitation, repetition, and obedience to those considered to be experts in applying the techniques. Principles unleash ingenuity; they evoke my impulses to find out about life and to organize the results of my research into my unique ways

of perceiving the world. An education based on principles encourages the student to confront the fear of asking questions, taking stands based on one's experience, or risking error. . . . An emphasis on technique creates a society of disciples and masters; principles generate communities of explorers. In the former, authority derives from the leader of the school; in the latter, from the clarification of experience, the refinement of sensitivity, and the feedback that comes from shared research. (Johnson 1986, 7)

Johnson believes that focusing on the underlying principles common to somatic practices, rather than individual somatic techniques, unifies the field of somatics (Johnson 1986).

Similarly, it is possible the underlying principles of modern dance training may help unify the continually evolving, ephemeral nature of modern dance technique classes. In addition, focusing on principles in the modern dance technique class may evoke curiosity in students, which may drive them to seek deeper meaning and embodiment in their dance experiences and a fuller understanding of the possibilities of their dance technique. Furthermore, delineating underlying principles of both somatic practices and modern dance technique may lead to deeper understanding of how these principles relate and ultimately how dance can be inherently somatic.

### **Somatic Principles**

In considering how to approach modern dance as a somatic practice, I found it necessary to better define what makes a practice somatic by assessing the underlying principles of somatics. The previous literature review supported the distillation of the principles of somatic movement practices. The principles listed in Table 1 are those I delineated as the fundamental and practical underpinnings of somatic movement methods.

Table 1: Principles of Somatic Movement Practices

<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Experiential formats</li><li>2. Process oriented</li><li>3. Awareness and sensory attunement</li></ol>
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It is important to note these principles are considered practical components that have been identified through the review of literature as central to a somatic approach to movement. These principles are supported by theoretical foundations that aim to find deeper meaning in movement. The theoretical foundations, scientific knowledge and historical developments that have supported the development of somatic movement practices, make distilling these principles possible. These principles are meant to focus on the merging of theory and practice (Johnson 1986), and are by no means intended to take the place of rigorous study in the rich theoretical, scientific, or historical components that have provided the developmental foundation of somatic movement practices. For the purpose of this study, it is implied that teachers considering implementation of these principles would possess a degree of supporting knowledge about the design and function of the human body, as well as historical and theoretical foundations underlying the development of somatic movement practices.

The process of delineating principles of somatic movement practices also revealed a number of strategies and practices which support the above foundational principles.

These somatic strategies and practices are listed in Table 2.



Table 2: Strategies and Practices of Somatic Movement Practices

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Movement dialogue (Goodnight 2008)</li><li>• Relating to the floor, gravity, and environment (Brodie and Lobel 2004)</li><li>• Initiation and sequencing (Brodie and Lobel 2004)</li><li>• Breathing (Hackney 1998; Brodie and Lobel 2004)</li><li>• Body connectivity (Brodie and Lobel 2004)</li><li>• Rest (Batson/IADMS 2009)</li><li>• Mindfulness (Enghauser 2007)</li><li>• Enhancing internal authority (Goodnight 2008)</li><li>• Empowerment of learner (Burnidge 2012)</li><li>• Focus on internal and external stimuli (inner and outer world) (Johnson 1986)</li><li>• Relating to surroundings and world (Enghauser 2007)</li></ul>
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The principles, practices, and strategies of somatics listed above in Table 1 and Table 2 became the cornerstone for investigating pedagogical methods which support the somatic practice of modern dance technique.

### **Modern Dance Technique Principles**

Delineating core principles of somatic practices through reviewing literature proved to be easier than outlining the core principles of modern dance. This is mostly due to the governing educational and certifying processes that exist in many somatic practices today, which have aided in understanding the fundamental framework for such practices. For example, the International Somatic Movement Education and Therapy Association (ISMETA) is committed to growing the field of somatic practices through promoting high standards in somatic training programs. Conversely, the field of modern dance has instilled far fewer guidelines. Variation inspired by individuality has instead seemed to create the very foundation for the development of modern dance practices.

Modern dance techniques are frequently defined by individually determined teaching methods, content, and movement trends. Although most modern dance teachers

have been influenced, to greater or lesser degrees, by the methods of other teachers and their own dance training experiences, modern dance technique classes are frequently based on the teacher's individual approach. In my experience, even modern dance teachers who claim to edify a specific method, such as Cunningham or Hawkins techniques, often do so through their own developed understanding and depiction of such methods. Modern dance techniques are therefore frequently influenced by the individual teacher's approach, aesthetic choices, movement background, and ultimate goals.

Joan Cass illuminates this individual approach to modern dance technique through describing the movement of Martha Graham:

The movement is tense. Even on the lighter side of the dynamic scale, there is never a relaxed swing or easy follow-through, but abrupt little motions. No limb of the body falls free, but is held in positions or moves in fixed paths. Graham's dance works are all built upon the Graham technique, and the Graham technique consists of exercises made up of phrases from Graham's dance works. (Cass 1993, 261)

Just as Graham trained dancers to perform her work, the aim of many dance teachers, still today, is to train dancers to perform their choreographic aesthetic. The practices and principles emphasized by modern dance teachers can vary greatly due to individual aesthetic choices and approaches to modern dance movement vocabulary and training.

There is a need for dancers to be capable of embodying versatile movement vocabularies and intentions in modern dance technique due to the broad range of movement vocabularies and performance practices that continue to evolve (Aceto 2012). As the boundaries of modern dance continue to be pushed by contemporary standards and practices, the process of distilling fundamental principles of modern dance technique is increasingly challenging. It is quite difficult to categorize a general scope of modern dance principles with such variation of movement vocabularies, aesthetic intentions, and

training practices. Realizing this, it became clear that my understanding of core modern dance principles would be heavily influenced by my own movement experiences, interests, and background. Therefore, in considering fundamental principles of modern dance, I have turned to personal experiences and historical references.

My early dance experiences could be described today as improvisational in nature. At a young age, I moved to music in anyway I wanted, rarely repeating a movement twice. Growing up on a ranch, I loved open spaces and I danced as much outside as I did inside. My exposure to dance was through pop culture and movies. Eventually through my creative play, I mounted performances for family members that were made up of movements of my own creation. I had very little understanding of dance as a formal studio practice or subject of study. At the age of fourteen, I took my first ballet class, and from here my understanding of dance shifted dramatically. I was taught that ballet was the foundation of all dance, and to be a “good” dancer meant having a strong foundation in ballet. I had very little interest in ballet, but I had a strong desire to be a good dancer. Lack of proximity to the dance studio dictated that I could only take ballet once a week and during winter months weather conditions made this difficult. I took occasional modern and jazz classes but my primary training was in ballet.

I was inspired to study dance more formally in college. My foundational understanding of dance quickly expanded. Although I enthusiastically studied modern, I approached modern technique through a classical lens. As I began to study the history of modern dance, I became interested in how modern differed from ballet, which also gradually became more apparent to me through an enhanced range of movement

experiences. After being exposed to Graham, Humphrey, Limon, Horton, Cunningham, Duncan, and Hawkins techniques, I had a broad foundational understanding of early modern dance. I understood modern dance to include such movement ideas as contract and release, fall and recover, drop and suspend, use of breath, awareness of alignment, articulation of the spine and other joints, moving to and on the floor, off-center challenges, and improvisation.

Techniques that hinged on the use of weight and momentum, such as Humphrey, Limon, and Hawkins helped me begin to understand my relationship to gravity. These experiences helped me become more aware of tension I carried and held in movement and I began to see my modern dance training as a place to address this. I found it was easier to address this in some classes than in others, which seemed related to the aesthetic of the movement form, but also to the learning environment established by the teacher. Classical forms of modern that were taught with more rigid expectations of behavior and progress seemed to add to my held tension. I began taking various Release-based contemporary technique classes. I experienced Release work that allowed me to work deeply and move more freely as an individual; however, again I noticed the class atmosphere greatly affected my ability to find ease in movement, even though the aesthetic seemed to hinge around this intention.

Interspersed throughout these modern dance experiences, I was exposed to the personal approaches and aesthetics of many modern dance teachers, some of whom were clearly influenced by early modern dance pioneers and others who were invested in finding and teaching their own movement aesthetic. Investigating new aesthetics in modern dance technique classes was especially helpful in preparing to perform these

aesthetics. This exploration of new aesthetics further triggered an interest in considering aspects of modern dance that have evolved and developed beyond those laid out by pioneers of modern dance.

After teaching and performing various dance forms for a number of years, I now realize this personal journey is very much a part of how I have come to understand core principles of modern dance technique. I have even come to find that I now frequently consider my early childhood dance experiences – finding freedom in movement, individual understanding and expression of movement, and the exploration of endless movement vocabularies – as part of how I see modern dance technique today. In addition, Joan Cass's description of principles of German modern dance, which were depicted to her by Hanya Holm in a 1946 interview, has been especially influential in establishing my own foundational understanding of modern dance principles as a teacher and student. She states,

The first principle is the study of body movement according to certain laws of motions. These are coordination, gravity, momentum, and progression, and are intrinsic in all dance. ... The second principle concerns the movement of the dancer in relation to the space in which he moves. ... The third principle is that the dancer must be challenged as an individual, rather than made to accept something alien, something imposed by the teacher. Only fundamentals are stressed, so that the pupil is given every opportunity to develop his own dance personality. (Cass 1993, 252)

After this extensive consideration of my own training in historical and contemporary modern dance techniques, for the purposes of this study, I created a list of modern dance intentions, which have influenced my understanding of modern dance technique today. Following the completion of this list, I noticed my understanding of modern dance technique has likely been influenced, at times unknowingly, by the field of somatics. In hindsight, my exposure to many somatic practices began inside of modern

dance technique class settings. I was often oblivious to this, however, since frequently teachers would incorporate somatic techniques into class with little distinction or discussion. From the list of intentions I distilled three underlying principles, which are listed in Table 3. The below principles became the foundation of this experimental modern dance technique course.

Table 3: Principles of Modern Dance Technique

- |   |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Awareness and understanding of the body, space, energy, and time in movement</li><li>2. Nurturing individuality</li><li>3. Preparation for performance</li></ol> |
|---|

This distillation process also revealed strategies and practices which support the above principles of modern dance technique. These strategies and practices can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4: Strategies and Practices of Modern Dance Technique

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Relating to gravity and the floor</li><li>• Articulation of joints</li><li>• Body part and movement initiation and sequencing</li><li>• 3-dimensional understanding of movement</li><li>• Understanding qualitative and dynamic movement ranges</li><li>• Finding ease in movement execution</li><li>• Use of breath</li><li>• Attention to sensation</li><li>• Efficient use of energy</li><li>• Understanding momentum</li><li>• Study of expression and communication through movement</li><li>• Building community</li></ul> |
|--|

Examining the principles, strategies, and practices listed above, along with those previously discerned for somatic movement practices, made it possible for me to further consider how modern dance technique can be inherently somatic.

## **How Can Dance Be Inherently Somatic?**

I initially started researching this question by considering how somatics and modern dance relate. Through considering the principles of each, I began to see intersections. More importantly though, I began to see that questioning what makes a movement practice somatic helped me begin to consider how and when dance is somatic. Fraleigh states, “At the intrinsic experiential level, somatic movement explorations and dance are related (2000, 60).” I would argue Fraleigh’s point a step further in suggesting that dance is somatic, depending on how one approaches his/her movement practice.

I have found both dance and somatic practices are able to cultivate knowledge through movement experiences that promote a unified engagement of mind and body. Enghauser states, “Viewed somatically, the very act of dancing eschews dualisms. In the dancing moment, mind and body work simultaneously, fluidly weaving thought and action” (Enghauser 2007, 81). The dance technique class setting may strive to refine movement abilities the same way somatic practices aim to – through lived, experiential moments that serve to heighten awareness, efficiency, and our ability to sense and respond. Pamela Geber and Margaret Wilson state, “The nature of somatic work is experiential. It takes the dancer beyond a discernment of the body that is only intellectual toward an embodied or experienced understanding” (2010, 52). Modern dance can provide opportunities to enhance embodied knowledge through movement. The experience of movement is central to both modern dance and somatic movement practices, as are the common values of kinesthetic awareness (Batson and IADMS 2009) and embodiment (Geber and Wilson 2010, Goodnight 2008). Dance can therefore be considered an experiential format, which is somatic movement principle number one.

Our ability to understand and experience modern dance technique as a somatic practice is further affected by the philosophies and modern dance principles the teachers embrace along with how they present these ideas. In re-examining the principles of somatic movement practices from Table 1 and the principles of modern dance technique I have delineated in Table 3, I see a similarity in that the principles in both tables speak to the underlying “how” versus the “what” of a technique. I have found the very act of embracing the principles of modern dance technique listed in Table 3 to be process oriented, the second somatic movement principle, evoking my curiosity and my desire to find deeper meaning in movement.

Preparation for performance, the third listed principle of modern dance technique, heavily relies on our desire to express, share, or communicate, with others something about ourselves or the world through dance. As defined earlier, somatics involves connecting to the world we live in, to our surroundings or environment. This means opening our awareness and ability to be expressive and relate to others and our world. Sensory attunement can improve sensitivity and awareness, making it possible to improve our ability to express and communicate (Shultz 2005). The practice of preparing to perform is essentially focused on the dancers’ ability to sense, respond, and communicate; and this involves sensory awareness (Shultz 2005), the third somatic movement principle.

The somatic principles in Table 1 seem to help define how a practice can be somatic, which could all be applicable to modern dance training. I have come to conclude when the modern dance technique principles from Table 3 and the somatic movement practice principles presented in Table 1 are considered in the modern dance



technique class, the inherently somatic nature of modern dance is emphasized. Focusing on principles, strategies, and practices brings attention to the “how” and makes way for the somatic practice of modern dance technique. Embracing dance as a somatic practice in the modern dance technique class is partially dependent on the philosophy and pedagogic style the teacher utilizes to shape the learning environment, as well as the student’s engagement and learning practices. A student’s ability to experience dance somatically is therefore highly contingent on the presence of principles, strategies, and practices which contribute to fostering a somatic learning environment.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Course Design**

The experimental modern dance technique course took place during the first eight weeks of the University of Oregon's fall 2012 quarter. Classes were held once a week for two hours in a dance department studio space. Participants for this voluntary study were recruited through posted flyers and a recruitment email letter (See Appendices A and B). There were 12 participants in the study, although not all participants were able to be present for the eight class sessions. All participants had some modern dance experience and had been placed at a level two (of five) or higher in accordance with University of Oregon dance curriculum levels. Participants ranged from young adults entering their first term of college to an adult with sporadic modern dance study over the past 30 years and nonlinear somatics training over the past 3 years. The majority of participants were in the 18 to 25 age range. Some participants had taken courses introducing them to somatic practices previous to participating in this course, some were taking classes in somatics concurrently to this course, and others had little to no exposure to somatics previous to this course. Each participant signed a consent form recognizing that classes would be video documented for the purpose of evaluating this study (See Appendix C).

In this modern dance technique course, I aimed to utilize an approach to dance training which emphasized the involvement of the mind and body in focusing one's attention on specific movement intentions or principles with the desire to enhance embodiment and students' ownership of their modern dance technique. The principles

addressed in the literature review, which were delineated through both literature review and personal experiences, supported the design and implementation of the goals and daily objectives of this course. Focusing on principles of both modern dance technique and somatic practices made it possible to determine course goals that emphasize the inherently somatic nature of dance in this experimental course. These developed course goals are listed in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Goals of Experimental Modern Dance Technique Course

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop one’s relationship to the floor and gravity</li><li>• Increase awareness of space, environment, and body</li><li>• Explore a diverse range of movement qualities, dynamics, and efforts</li><li>• Enhance efficiency and internal authority in movement experiences</li><li>• Encourage a mindful approach to dance experiences and feedback</li><li>• Offer embodied dance performance experiences</li></ul> |
|---|

These goals stimulated the daily objectives focused on in course preparation and planning, which were cumulatively layered in the eight class sessions. All of the above goals remained at the core of each class, although often only one or two of these goals were centrally considered in deriving the objectives of single class sessions, which ultimately influenced the preparation of class activities and exercises for that class session. Daily objectives and activities of each executed lesson plan are outlined in Appendix D.

The lesson plans provided in Appendix D represent the actual activities presented in each class session. Although a general outline of lesson plans was determined previous to the commencement of the course, lesson plans and activities were adjusted as the course progressed in response to my evaluations and perceptions of the participants’ progress with the daily class objectives. Lesson plan evaluation points, which are

derivatives of the daily objectives, are presented at the end of each lesson plan in Appendix D. As I reflected during each class, I considered how the students appeared to be embodying movement activities. From my perspective, I often visually considered if the students appeared to be present in the movement activity with focused attention and curiosity about their movement experience. I noted if students appeared to “check out” of an exploration or set dance sequence and how they dealt with moments when they were challenged by performing or remembering the movement. I also considered their verbal responses during discussions and in writing activities. At first this reflection resulted in adjusting the activities or the delivery of the lesson plan for the next class. Through evaluating and reflecting on my effectiveness as a facilitator of a somatic experience, I soon discovered a need to respond throughout class to my moment-to-moment evaluations of the students’ involvement with course material. This meant that adjustments were frequently made in the moment during class in response to the students’ expressed understanding, as well as how the students appeared to be embodying movement material and finding ownership of modern dance experiences. Therefore, the lesson plans in Appendix D are the outcome of the reflection and action process I frequently underwent during class sessions.

### Course Activities and Structure

Guided improvisational movement explorations were frequently utilized as a means of directing students’ *attention* to specific *intentions*. These explorations were interspersed with set movement dance sequences throughout class to create opportunities for individual consideration and investigation of objectives that were focused on within

the dance sequences. Improvised movement explorations shifted focus from the “what” of set movement sequences to the underlying “how” of movement and the individual’s interpretation and embodied understanding of these intentions. These *attentional practices* (De Spain 2003) were used to encourage mindful focusing of attention and awareness on present moment experiences.

In transitioning between improvised movement explorations and set movement sequences, students were encouraged to continue with a mindful investigation of the daily objectives while placing emphasis on the “how” versus the accuracy of the prescribed sequence of steps, or the “what”. Set dance sequences were repeated multiple times over a number of class sessions to provide opportunities for the students to be less concerned with memory of set sequences, and more concerned with investigating underlying principles, as well as course goals and objectives. Students were guided to explore set movement sequences with a similar curiosity and attention that was utilized during the improvised explorations.

Curriculum activities were occasionally influenced by specific modern dance or somatic practices, although the intention behind these activities was aimed at considering underlying core principles of modern dance and somatic practices. For example, Bartenieff inspired movements (Hackney 1998) were utilized in some set floor warm-up sequences merely as a means of bringing awareness to an experiential, process oriented strategy of exploring initiating and sequencing (Table 2, Page 29). Vivid imagery, anatomical descriptions, and sensitivity to individuality (Barr, 2009) were considered in developing and investigating course activities and feedback. Visual and verbal guidance of movement explorations and set dance sequences were both utilized as means of

communicating and facilitating discovery of intent. This included demonstrating without talking, talking without demonstrating, and frequently demonstrating while talking (Englesrud 2007).

Course content attempted to move away from the product focus of a skill acquisition model, often seen in traditional dance training (Daniels 2009), towards one which embraces the process of somatic dance inquiry and embodiment with the aim of enhancing students' ownership and presence in dance technique (Fortin, Long, and Lord 2002; Diaz 2006). Focus was placed on the individual process of embodying the "how" of movement as technique, rather than focusing on the steps or the "what" as technique. Priority was given to sensation, ease of movement, and the process of embodying movement as opposed to focusing on external demands. To this end, the mirrors of the studio were covered and emphasis was placed on movement sensations as opposed to movement correctness. I avoided commenting on "wrong" or "right" in terms of movement accuracy and instead asked questions in an attempt to learn about the students' experiences, such as "How do you relate to the floor in this movement?" I also avoided placing "good" or "bad" values on a technique or way of doing the movement and focused more on neutral statements and questions. For example, one neutral statement I used was "I see a dynamic use of the floor in the movement exploration and I wonder how that could inform this set dance sequence." In addition, students were encouraged many times to provide neutral and affirmative peer feedback that brought attention to visual elements they saw in each other's dancing, as opposed to what they did not see.

In this course, I attempted to emphasize a learner-centered education model versus a teacher-centered model, which is often authoritarian and has been traditionally

utilized in teaching dance (Daniels 2009). For this purpose, this course emphasized valuing the students' individual experiences as a necessary part of the learning process by bringing attention to sensation and awareness of movement and by involving students in researching mindful and embodied feedback options.

### Writing Activities

Writing activities were used throughout the course to enhance holistic experiences and mindfulness in dance technique. Occasionally, sessions were started with writing activities to focus the students' attention on the course goals and daily objectives. These activities focused on helping students consider the language of their movement experiences, leading potentially to finding deeper understanding. Betsy Cooper explains, "Writing can inform and clarify our perception, reception, and comprehension of dance practices, just as tuning into kinesthetic experience can invigorate and bring veracity to dance writing (2011, 53)."

A specialized writing activity was further investigated and developed throughout the course, which involved the use of present tense language in describing movement sensation and experiences from the dancer's inner experience. "Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen believes in the importance of a kind of first-person ownership of perception. We should realize that our perceptions are our reality and that we have agency" (Goodnight 2008, 46). Johnson contends, "First person observation of the soma is immediately factual" (1995, 342). By speaking in the present tense and honoring the first person perspective, Peggy Hackney feels our attention is brought to the self in the present moment (Goodnight 2008), which may serve to enhance internal authority. In Authentic

Movement communication practices, the movers and witnesses both speak in the first-person and present tense to enhance ownership and direct connection to movement experiences (Seereiter 2012).

This investigated writing activity was also influenced by Sondra Fraleigh's phenomenological writing process (Fraleigh 1998) and by Betsy Cooper's "embodied writing" process (Cooper 2011). Fraleigh encourages first writing through a phenomenological lens, without judgment or analysis. Later analysis of descriptions and reflections may then yield a deeper understanding of dance experiences (Fraleigh 1998). Cooper encourages students to seek greater understanding about dance by using both a "first person somatosensory" (2011, 53) perspective and a third-person spectator approach in writing, which can counter the dualism of mind and body that is often experienced in academia (Cooper 2011). Although I often considered the third person perspective while I observed or witnessed student participation, for the purposes of this study, considering my own and the students' first person perspectives was most informative. For example, students were frequently asked to consider such questions as "How do you feel in this moment?" or "What do you see?" Examples of the students' written first person perspectives appear later in Chapter IV.

### **Evaluating**

The evaluation process of this movement project involved multiple layers. A continual process of self-reflection was utilized in evaluating my ability to facilitate somatic dance experiences over the eight weeks of the experimental modern dance technique class. This was the first level and primary focus of the evaluation process.



Self-reflection was further enhanced through considering my perceptions of the students' progress and ability to grasp course objectives based on my presentation of course activities. This second layer involved considering my perceptions of the students' understanding of movement activities through my observations and the commentary of students, which was in the form of discussions and writing activities. Reflecting on the students' remarks in the daily writing activities following each class session helped further direct and enhance my actions for the following class. Although writing activities varied at times, an evolving embodied phenomenological writing process was the primary writing activity focus, which was utilized and developed over the eight weeks.

Evaluation of the design, implementation, and results of this experimental modern dance technique class is subjective and based on my course journaling, in-class student writings, in-class discussions with participants, and review of video documentation. Guided in-class writing activities relied on individual experiences and the participants' individual interpretation of the activities.

In evaluating my ability to facilitate somatic dance experiences, I reflected by journaling with notes about my presentation of material and observations of the students' participation following class sessions. I read the participants' responses to writing activities to consider their perspectives and to determine clarity of instructions, level of student investment, understanding of course objectives and goals, neutral to affirmative language development, and ability to vividly describe movement experiences. I watched video documentation of the classes to consider my role as the facilitator, flow of the class, and use of language. I considered evaluation points of each lesson plan (See Appendix D) as I reflected on class activities and the presentation of course material.

Evaluation of this movement project was geared towards understanding: how teaching modern dance as a somatic experience differs from an authoritarian dance pedagogy model, and how implementing a somatic teaching philosophy may affect my teaching strategies and practices as I work towards facilitating somatic dance inquiry in a modern dance technique class.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this movement project was to investigate principles of modern dance technique and pedagogical practices which emphasize the inherently somatic nature of dance through the design, implementation, and evaluation of an experimental modern dance class. The process of designing and implementing this movement project made it possible to evaluate the following questions:

- How can dance be inherently somatic?
- How does teaching modern dance as a somatic experience differ from an authoritarian dance pedagogy model?
- How did implementing a somatic teaching philosophy affect my teaching strategies and practices as I work towards facilitating somatic dance inquiry in a modern dance technique class?

The first bulleted question – How can dance be inherently somatic? – was initially addressed in Chapter II (Pages 35-38) through considering the principles of somatics and modern dance as a forerunner to designing and implementing an experiential modern dance technique class (Pages 28-35). Results and discussion of the other two questioned points follow.

## **How Does Teaching Modern Dance as a Somatic Experience Differ from an Authoritarian Dance Pedagogy Model?**

While designing course content and considering how to implement lesson plans, I found it necessary to contemplate pedagogical practices that could emphasize the inherently somatic nature of dance. I began to ask the above question, finding it was necessary to examine how somatic dance pedagogy practices would differ from authoritarian dance pedagogy practice in making the shift towards facilitating somatic dance inquiry. These differences were initially revealed through a review of literature. My understanding of these differences was further enhanced through implementing and evaluating pedagogical practices in an experimental modern dance technique course. Further considering the students' perspective helped me value the process of cultivating somatic inquiry through pedagogical practices. Practical examples and themes of somatic dance pedagogy began to emerge as a result of this research. Five emerging themes will be discussed throughout this section: 1) honoring student perspective in learning; 2) process, mindfulness, and movement dialogue; 3) language; 4) repetition; and 5) dedicated time. I will consider the support of previous authors, my perspective, and student examples in discussing each emerging theme.

### **Honoring Student Perspective in Learning**

Many authoritarian dance pedagogy practices have been developed through the notion that the teacher is the ultimate authority and source of knowledge. Somatic dance pedagogy, on the contrary, aspires to empower the individual as an active seeker and source of knowledge (Burnidge 2012). Andrea Olsen feels much of our traditional dance

education has been focused on the external while students attempt to mimic their teachers (Goodnight 2008). Focusing on the teacher as the only source of authority can enhance an outward focus and create an external need for validation. Burnidge asserts,

[I]n Western dance training the external often becomes predominant, and the internal journey or body-intelligence of the dancer becomes secondary or negated completely. Dancers are often judged from the outside based on the correctness or “beauty” of their external movements and their physical body attributes – height, weight, size of various body parts and so forth. (2012, 39)

Peggy Hackney believes that many dancers grow tired of trying to mimic outwardly directed images of something or somebody else and yearn to attend to themselves (Goodnight 2008). Olsen encourages technique teachers to support students’ quests to find “meaning in movement rather than simply attempt to outwardly mimic movement qualities or shapes” (Goodnight 2008, 36).

In the experiential modern dance course of this movement project research, guided improvisation-based movement explorations were utilized to create opportunities for students to explore, learn, and create meaning in movement through their own investigation of daily objectives. The process of understanding movement and underlying principles in this experiential modern dance course required individual attention and investigation. In each session students were guided to explore movement intentions and objectives with focus on their own inquiry process and curiosity. For example, in Session 4 the objective of enhancing awareness of one’s surrounding space and environment was investigated through bringing attention to the information the students were receiving through their senses. Students were guided through movement explorations while questioning what they see, hear, touch and smell – a process that necessitated their individual attention and investigation. Experiencing dance somatically,

therefore, asks students to consider their internal perspectives, sensations, and experiences.

Somatic dance pedagogy honors the students' subjective understanding, which can create opportunities for whole-self education, while authoritarian dance pedagogy practices often objectify dance by teaching "physical rules" of dance (Burnidge 2012, 41), which can assert right and wrong ways of moving. Burnidge states, "An objective viewpoint is not inherently bad; however, its frequent overemphasis in traditional dance training devalues internal (subjective) perception, awareness, knowledge, and wisdom and serves to further promote a Cartesian bifurcation of mind and body" (2012, 39). Somatic dance pedagogy practices can place value on the dancer's subjective, internal perspective through encouraging students to share their perspectives. In this experiential modern dance course, students were encouraged to consider and discuss their perspectives within feedback sessions and in writing activities. For example, in Sessions 4 and 5, students were guided to engage in peer feedback and were involved in the process of questioning what it means to give neutral to affirmative feedback. In a group discussion we considered together how to language feedback as neutral or affirmative statements and the students provided possible examples for each other. In writing activities, students were prompted in a way that directed them toward considering their first-person perspective. For example, in class Session 3, students were guided through conducting a body scan. Following the scan the students were prompted to write about their body scans considering how they felt, what they noticed, where their minds went, and even what they found themselves thinking about during their scans.

Goodnight explains the expert interviewees of her study “believe that empowering dancers to be responsible for their own care and training is a powerful step towards health and success” (Goodnight 2008, 45). Through empowering dancers to look within their personal movement experiences for meaning, internal authority may be enhanced (Goodnight 2008). This empowerment can lead to ownership of dance experiences by dancers taking a deeper responsibility for themselves and a more active role in their learning as they consider and employ strategies of understanding their modern dance technique. For example, in Session 2, dancers were guided to explore their relationship to the floor and consider various strategies and techniques for utilizing, connecting, and relating to the floor. The students were further prompted to apply the strategies they were investigating to their explorations of set dance sequences.

To further encourage individual ownership of dance experiences in this study, dancers were asked to define modern dance technique and somatics each twice over the duration of the course. Modern dance technique was defined during Sessions 2 and 8 and somatics was defined during Sessions 5 and 8. The first time these terms were defined, I prompted the students to focus on these terms in a general way, as a field. The second time, students were asked to personally define their modern dance technique and somatic experiences. The specific questions I posed in these sessions appear at the top of the columns in Tables 6 and 7. In all instances, the students’ perspectives were valued by encouraging them to respond through consideration of their own experiences and thoughts about these terms. They were also prompted to write without concern for the “correct” answers or for pleasing me. Tables 6 and 7 show the participants’ first and second entries side-by-side for comparison. Only the entries of those participants present

for both instances of defining modern dance technique (Sessions 2 and 8) or somatics (Sessions 5 and 8) are shown in the following tables.

Table 6: Students Define Modern Dance Technique

<b>How do you define modern dance technique today, in this moment? (Session 2)</b>	<b>How do you define <i>your</i> modern dance technique? (Session 8)</b>
“Evolving/expanding; technical in the aspect of body alignment; alignment allows for release, strength, breath”	“Deep, has history of all of the instructors I’ve had. Professors and grads are included in this history. My modern technique is still evolving, changing for the better. So many different components involved.”
“I guess I think of it as honest, organic movement that comes from someone and reveals something about the artist.”	“Modern dance is original, organic movement that is not limited to the confines of defined steps or technical terms.”
“Modern dance technique today for me continues to include acceptance, development of skills and of self, inclusiveness and joy. (My first modern dance experience was in 1972.)”	“My modern dance (technique) began with much Martha Graham influence and I now would add somatic (embodied) influences. Modern dance is inclusive, imaginative, expressive, creative, exploratory.”
“Changing, contemporary, structured or free (often both), open to new influences, somatically informed”	“Balance of structured technique and free form expression, grounded, weighted, organic, spinal, spiraling, can be virtuosic – or not, break from classical boundaries, floor connection, integration, widely interpreted, sensation, physical”
“The current favorite recipe (and its variations) of movement approaches which are drawn from absolutely any field of past dance (movement). The gifts our ‘dancers’ have left us.”	“My modern dance technique is a rhythm only my body can hear; a succession of volumes and feelings. My modern dance technique is a love affair with earth and the weight of me that it claims. My modern dance technique is ever-evolving.”



Table 7: Students Define Somatics

How do you define somatics? (Session 5)	How do you define or describe <i>your</i> somatic experiences? (Session 8)
<p>“Somatics – ‘body’. Movement of the body including your whole self, mind, spirit and feelings. Dancing from within. The inside out instead of outside in like many conventional ways of dance that focus on exact positions... but rather somatics is emotion driven. The kind of “in the moment” dance in much of the improv parts of class.”</p>	<p>“Body inside out. Dancing more from your soul. Dancing body mind together.”</p>
<p>“Working together with every aspect of the body. If somatics deals with examining the body and mind, as well as essentially defining the self, then I don’t really see how every experience isn’t somatic. Perfect unity of mind and body? Essentially, experience. Somatics = experience.”</p>	<p>“Somatics is a concept having to do with the unification of the mind and body with space and time as the limiting factors. It is understanding a perfection, whatever that means for the subject, of expression in the physical world through the body.”</p>
<p>“Body, mind, emotion working together, all integrated. All that is encompassed in ourselves. Where is your mind?”</p>	<p>“Body integrity and integration, full use of every part of a being – mind, spirit, structure, breath, etc. It all comes together to assist in movement practices.”</p>
<p>“Active study and experience of being present within the relationships between mind, body, and all.”</p>	<p>“Sharing/equally dividing any attentions among the body and mind. Experiencing the ride my mind takes through the landscape of my internal, tangible self.”</p>
<p>“This word has taken on a deeper meaning since I have begun practices with embodiment of my tissues, fluids, organs, vessels, breath, and even embryological development. My comfort with this process has increased exponentially with each experience, with personal exploration. Contact whether guided or improvised has been a key component of my development, understanding (such that it is at this moment), and joy in the process.”</p>	<p>“Somatics involves more inner focus and a combination of technique and theories of anatomy and physiology. Theory and practice feed into each other: Mind and body, being one with the spirit of the dance.”</p>
<p>“Integration and interaction of our whole selves – body, mind, soul, spirit, personality, ego, thoughts, emotions – for easeful, mindful whole body movement... emotions or thoughts intimately and strongly connected with physical sensations in the body... brought out by certain movements, manipulations or explorations. Being fully present in an experience.”</p>	<p>“Moving with an awareness of the entire being – body, mind, soul, spirit, personality, thoughts, emotions, intellect, sensation – integration emphasis on easeful and efficient motion.”</p>
<p>“All that is encompassed in ourselves. Improvisation could be a form of somatics because it is pure, honest, movement that hasn’t been analyzed or edited. Improv requires the synergy of all aspects of the self.”</p>	<p>“Employing the use of one’s entire self to execute a movement or phrase.”</p>

Participants were also asked many times to consider their intentions or goals, sensations, and personal engagement with the process of moving as a means of bringing attention to ownership of ephemeral experiences. At times students were asked to personally reflect during an exercise and other times they were asked to share their reflections in writing activities as pedagogic devices for honoring the student perspective. For example, in Sessions 1 and 2, students were asked to write about their intentions or goals, as a strategy of bringing attention to the students' role in their learning. Below are examples of these writing entries, which I feel best exhibit the students' recognition of their role in learning:

“My intention today: to experience my body's movement as a source of joy.”

“My main intention for today is to be gentle with myself and be mindful of sensation.”

“To be open to every possibility of learning something new about myself, my body, and how I move”

“To enjoy myself, learn, move, and care for my body”

“Move full and truly”

“My goal for today is to grow comfortable in this new environment and to let go of any fear of apprehension and simply dance.”

“To get a better understanding of modern dance and how it feels on my body. To improve my modern dance technique so it feels much easier and I can ultimately move up quicker in modern dance levels.”

Students were also prompted at times to reflect on how they feel and what they sense in specific moments or exercises as a strategy for bringing attention to the present moment and students' perspectives. I generally did not distinguish between emotional feelings or physical sensation in asking the students how they feel in a moment or movement, but rather made space for the students to openly interpret and perceive these ideas and

experiences. I did, however, frequently frame this question multiple ways to encourage their open ended response. For example, I would ask, “How do you feel in this moment?” as well as “What do you sense?” and “How does this movement feel?” to provide opportunities to consider their whole experience in reflection. At times these reflection processes were integrated into movement activities with verbal responses by the students and other times students’ reflections were recorded in their written responses. Below are examples that represent what the students wrote regarding how they feel or what they sense:

“I am sensing the solidity and smoothness of the floor on my belly and legs and feel my feet turning, ankles active.”

“warm, full, stretched out, left knee sore”

“In this moment, I feel... energized, tired, sore, thoughtful, happy, excited, content, open, explorative, loving, satisfied, strong.”

“In this moment I feel very warm but my muscles are pretty tight.”

“How the movement feels: open, stretched, gooey, mushy, my mind gets lost sometimes in my body’s flow, reach, extension, energy, moving out into the space”

“Heavy, which is to say, aware of good old gravity. Bound in some areas. Mildly stressed from academic responsibilities. At about 72% of normal maximum energy.”

“I am feeling heavy, gravity in my hips all the way down to my toes. The sensation is from the inside out, like in my bones. From my lower waist up, I feel my body light and free of any burdens. I can move it without any hindrance.”

“Well, this past week has been somewhat stressful so at this very moment I’m trying to relax and I guess get in touch with my senses again. I’ve noticed that usually when I become anxious or stressed I tend to focus on only thoughts (e.g. what I have to do, how/when I have to do them) and focusing on my senses helps me “decompress” and feel in touch with the world again.”

In further bringing attention to personal engagement with the movement and student ownership of dance experiences, a specialized writing activity was developed and investigated throughout the course, which involved the use of present tense language in describing movement sensation and experiences from the dancer's inner experience. Examples of this embodied phenomenological writing (Fraleigh 1998; Cooper 2011) can be seen in the following section while discussing the emerging theme of process, dialogue, and mindfulness.

### Process, Mindfulness, and Movement Dialogue

In considering a more holistic approach to teaching modern dance technique, I found the way of executing the movement became the technique, rather than the designated steps or the “what” of the movement design. While some authoritarian dance pedagogy practices are product or result oriented, somatic dance pedagogy is concerned with the process or the “how” of movement. Concept-focused teaching can be used to emphasize principles of modern dance technique through considering and exploring the “how” or process of movement in time and space (Johnson 1986; Barr 2009; Batson and IADMS 2009). This process-oriented way of working diverts attention away from the end product while valuing the internal experience (Burnidge 2012). In this modern dance class, attention was placed on the processes of investigating principles of modern dance technique and increasing awareness of sensation in the present moment to emphasize understanding modern dance technique from inside the movement experience. For example, in Session 1, students were guided to bring attention to body systems and structures, such as the skin and fluids; and in Session 5, students were prompted to

explore distal and proximal ends of bones and joints. I guided these activities verbally, utilizing imagery and my anatomical knowledge. In both explorations and set dance sequences attention was directed to possible sensations and elements that make up the process of the students' movement.

When focus is placed on modern dance intentions through movement dialogue (Goodnight 2008) and mindfulness (Holzel et al. 2011; Brown, Ryan, & Creswell 2007) the result may be deeper embodiment in holistic dance experiences. Movement dialogue and mindfulness are elements frequently present in the “attentional” practices (De Spain 2003) of improvisation and Authentic Movement (Enghauser 2007). According to Enghauser, improvisational activities can provide opportunities to “connect to the subjective, body-self stream of moving consciousness” (2007, 88). Enhanced awareness and attention, both of which are necessary elements of mindfulness practice (Holzel et al. 2011; Brown, Ryan, & Creswell 2007), can facilitate deeper understanding of the moving consciousness. Mindfulness is also characterized by neutral, non-judgmental thought. Practicing modern dance mindfully can enhance confidence and development of the “dancer’s somatic voice as a companion technical skill” (Enghauser 2007, 88). The focusing of attention and enhanced awareness that comes from practicing mindfulness (Holzel et al. 2011; Brown, Ryan, & Creswell 2007) makes the mindful practice of modern dance technique an important feature of experiencing modern dance technique holistically as a somatic practice.

In this experimental modern dance technique class, activities were aimed at promoting student-centered movement experiences through mindful awareness of the present moment and all that it could encompass. Improvisational and set dance sequence

activities, embedded throughout this modern dance technique class, were used as experiential tools for exploring the principles of modern dance technique. Objectives were explored through focusing *attention* to specific *intentions* during improvised movement explorations and set dance sequences. After performing a set movement sequence, improvised movement explorations were often used to explore an objective or movement intention that was being focused on within the set dance sequence. Following explorations, set dance sequences were repeated while bringing mindful attention to the previously explored movement objective through verbal cueing. Students were encouraged to approach the set dance sequences with a similar curiosity, immediacy, and mindfulness utilized in improvised explorations. The aim of this process was to help students dialogue with the movement and their bodies, as opposed to forcing movements to happen while controlling the external appearance of the body.

Movement dialogue is essentially the process of exploring aspects of one's movement experience with the option to adjust and stay in conversation with those dynamic and changeable features through movement. In comparison, some authoritarian dance training practices emphasize a control model, which in my own experience can create excessive tension by asking students to hold, maintain, or create the "correct" external image, with little consideration of internal dialogue. Somatic practitioners, on the other hand, often encourage movement dialogue processes in their pedagogical practices (Goodnight 2008).

Dialoguing with specific movement intentions and objectives was often stressed throughout entire class sessions. For example, one of the objective focuses of Session 2 was to explore and sense diverse and dynamic relationships with the floor. Students were

asked to consider various relationships to the floor through dialoguing with the movement and floor in both improvised explorations and set dance sequences. Some of the ideas students were cued to consider included what parts of them were touching the floor, when they felt light versus heavy, and various yielding and pushing dynamics with the floor. After exploring connectivity to the floor throughout the session, the students were asked to write statements about what they experienced in exploring their relationship to the floor. This was a time for students to briefly identify what they learned, possible sensations, and any questions they may have had about their exploration of the floor throughout class. The following are a few examples that represent the students' written responses:

“Exploring my relationship to the floor I found that no matter what body part I place on it, it will support me. It holds me up. I can release and be completely heavy, totally reliant on it. If I push down it resists.”

“Push and release. Leaning versus self-support. My body's natural tension or release into the surface beneath. Getting back what you put into it, energy-wise.”

“The floor burns. When skin drags, it burns. It's rigid against hip bones and knees and elbows. It can lift and drag.”

“Less security when less of my body is on the floor. I find that when I think about the floor and yield I feel more grounded.”

“The floor felt great. I felt like it was working with me. When I pressed on it and it happened to enjoy my pressure.”

“What I found is that a dancer has a very caring relationship to the floor because the floor is always there to support you physically.”

These responses highlighted students' dialogue with the movement and the process oriented focus they utilized in relating to the floor in movement.

An embodied phenomenological writing process was utilized and developed throughout this course. This writing process was influenced by embodied writing

(Cooper 2011), phenomenological description (Fraleigh 1998, 2000), Authentic Movement communication processes (Seereiter 2012), and elements of mindfulness. Cooper explains in embodied writing the “emphasis should be placed on process rather than product” (2011, 59). For the purposes of this course this writing process was intended to be a method to help the students relive their kinesthetic and visceral dance sensations and experiences. Fraleigh states, “Phenomenological description aims towards original, intuitive description of sense experience, the body-mind axis of our lived experience” (2000, 60). Students were frequently asked to relive a previous movement experience, as if they were going through that experience in the present moment. This process was aimed at bringing awareness, language, and immediacy to their lived movement experiences while encouraging self-reflection. Essentially this writing process developed into a mindfulness practice that brought attention to and increased awareness of the dancers’ inner experiences. Their inner dialogue and process can be gleaned from the below excerpts of the students’ embodied phenomenological writing:

“I am rocking, shifting my weight, feeling the floor support me from beneath and feeling the expansive space about and around me. I’m reaching from my fingertips to my toes, expanding into the space. Then I’m contracting in, pulling away from the space around me. Trying to be inside myself. Almost immediately I am returning to reaching away, swinging around and down. Spiraling into the floor. Using my breath to lead me into the ground.”

“I rotate – body halves twist around the axis, reach and drop, pivot – not sure which way, doesn’t matter. Reach up, up, down gather around. Step and step and swing around the axis. Circle and up and reach. I spiral down and soft and rebound into and out of the floor, twist around. Eyes up, contract and pull in, crossing, gliding over, pivot, pivot – which way? Oh well. Push out, swish over, yes – snake spiral twist down and float to the floor.”

“I am moving fluid and continuous letting water drip down my arms down to my feet. Moving driftily (not a word) thinking about what it would be like to do the movement under water with slight resistance. As well as picturing the water as a calm force, not turbulent.”



“Finding where I am on the earth. Found. I melt and I go to find a new place. Meander in one place, looking for myself. Found. I melt and find a new place. Explore and I ground myself into my new home such as direction, gravity, texture. I scoop myself up and I fall away from my home. Now my torso is exploring the gravity of my home. My hands are exploring the floor. They feel the weight of my body, the smooth cold floor, the floor pushing them back up. Gravity takes over my feet and I am standing up right finding peace in my new home.”

“I’m thinking about going down into the floor to shift out of my body, spiraling in and out of the floor. Extend through the top of my head at the top of the weight shift. I wobble a little, recover. I connect through my entire spine in the rise. There are moments I lose thought process – autopilot moving through memory without active thinking. I’m confused on specific steps; think instead about concepts and spatial orientation. I look at my knee as it comes to my shoulder, fill out the moments of the leg stretch. I take my time. Come up, fall out lunge, slice across, contained energy in the center of my body, walk around recover.”

“Shift, breathe, shift, balance, shift rotate, stretch foot, foot, flow. What comes next? Sweep the foot/leg. Look up, up and over. Weight in the hands, back, back. Oh someone is behind me. Stop, go forward. Leg stretch heel into the floor. Tighten the core, balance, cut behind, loose limbs, breathe, breathe. Relax through the movements. Walk it out. Done. Tired. I am humming. I can feel the fluid running through my body alert yet heavy. My legs are tired. Trouble staying balanced. Need to lift through the hip and not sink. Rotation in my femur. Stretching all the way through my body to come down and quickly move the foot and leg. Heavy weight into the two steps. Now weightless movement reaching up to come down, hands and feet. I don’t like crawling backwards, unnatural. Stretching through both legs. Grounded all through my body to stand up. Finish.”

“I hear a sustained chord and I reach my hand out – away from my core and feel the stretch travel from my fingers up my arm, into my shoulder and back. I engage my legs, one to receive weight and one to follow the line of stretch/tension that started from my fingers. I sense a widening in my back and feel a fullness and warmth throughout.”

“Right side. Shifting, breathing, stepping, shifting, shifting, sturdy openness. Muscles juicy and strong pushing the floor away. Pressing down, floating upwards. Relaxing into the breath, reaching out into the space, spiraling, spiraling downwards. Sweeping, shifting, pressing into, pushing away from the floor, extending away. Stretching to the tips of my toes contracting in, placing, rooting into the floor. Slicing the air, spiraling around facing forward. Standing tall. Breath.”

These statements not only give language to the students' inner experiences, but could also help each dancer find deeper meaning in their movement experiences with further analysis of their writing. Due to the length of this course, I chose to not address this next level of analysis, which Sondra Fraleigh suggests in her phenomenological writing process (Fraleigh, 1998). However, the writing process used pinpointed the students' individual experiences as important, pivotal aspects of their modern dance training and created opportunities to find ownership of dance experiences through language. The importance of language will be further discussed in the subsequent section of this chapter.

The following statement by Hanya Holm further highlights the importance of students approaching their modern dance technique with mindful consideration of movement process and dialogue in supporting the discovery of ownership of dance experiences.

You are your own master and student. There is no value in copying what someone else has done. You must search within your own body. What you discover there will be for your own benefit. Others can give you the means, the tools, but they cannot do it for you. The art of dancing is in no book, nor can you take it with a spoon or in [the] form of pills. Dance can only result from your own concentration and understanding.” (Holm [1969] 1998, 71-72)

Although much responsibility is on the teacher to provide the environment and pedagogical practices that support the students' process of developing their somatic voices and ownership of movement experiences, it is ultimately the students' willingness to accept their experiences as uniquely their own, which can make ownership of dance technique experiences possible.

## Language

The use of language in dance pedagogy was perhaps one of the earliest established themes in this research project. Considering both what language is used and how teachers use their language to deliver class content and bring attention to intentions of movement, is perhaps one of the more direct ways we can come to understand the pedagogical philosophy of a teacher. In implementing this experimental modern dance technique course, I found the delivery of an overarching aim, goals, and course objectives to be highly dependent on my ability as a facilitator to communicate intentions through the use of language. Language is made up of words that can carry many basic meanings. The vocal delivery of words can convey a deeper clarification of the intended meaning. Mark Taylor states, “At its most fundamental level, your voice is an expression of who you are. It reveals your state of mind, aspects of your history, and how you relate to others. The tone of your voice can say more than the words you speak” (Taylor 2012, 58). Language, encompassing words and vocal delivery for the purpose of this project, is the verbal component of a highly nonverbal form of communication – dance (Shultz 2005).

My experiences with authoritarian dance pedagogy have inspired me to look at how language, a verbal expression, influences our nonverbal experiences. In the authoritarian model, I have observed a direct and sometimes harsh tone to some teachers’ verbal communication. By commanding students’ attention, this directness can make an implied statement that the teacher is the absolute authority. The communication often flows one way. The teacher verbally comments and corrects while the student passively waits to receive knowledge from the teacher. An expected student response is typically a

non-verbal demonstration of attempting to apply these comments, with little dialogue or questioning. In an authoritarian dance pedagogy model, a teacher may make short commanding statements repeatedly throughout class, such as “shoulders down,” “lift up,” “centers in,” “knit the ribs,” and “point your feet” just to name a few. These statements are often while students are moving and are not always further discussed to clarify meaning. When a discussion is prompted, it is frequently relating to a teacher’s preconceived ideas and values and when questions are asked of the students, they are often leading questions, which are worded to direct students to the teacher’s “preferred” answer or method.

In a somatic dance pedagogy model, teachers regularly reflect and evaluate the effectiveness of language and its delivery. Taylor states, “We study vocal embodiment in order to support ease of physical and vocal expression, to make ourselves understood and heard, to communicate what is important to our students and clients...” (Taylor 2012, 61). Language is used to guide students to find meaning in their personal experiences. The students’ perspectives are honored through open-ended, unbiased questioning about the students’ experiences (Burnidge 2012), such as “How do your shoulders feel?”, “What sensations do you notice in the center of the body?”, “How do your head and tail relate?”, and “What is the purpose of this movement?” Discussions are opportunities to bring focus to the uniqueness of individual experiences and diverse ways of understanding and experiencing movement. “Instead of relying solely on a ‘Just Do It’ model, the somatic dance educator enters into a dialogue with students, guiding individual growth and progress while creating a safe supportive environment that invites the holistic wisdom of each dancer to become part of the larger teaching and learning

discourse” (Burnidge 2012, 40). Students are encouraged to share their experiences to learn from each other as equal members of a community. Therefore, in a somatic pedagogical model the students’ verbal communication is as important, if not more important, than the teacher’s use of language.

In this experimental modern dance course, as the facilitator I at times experienced the need to use language sparingly while verbally guiding without demonstrating. Each statement or question seemed to linger when fewer prompts or statements were made, provoking greater curiosity. Students had more time to digest comments, questions, or verbal cues when language was used sparingly. I had to consider the necessary ingredients of verbal cues and the best time to deliver them in relationship to students’ explorations. Language was intended to be used in this class to help students focus their attention toward their sensations and experiences in their own explorations of modern dance technique ideas. This required regular evaluation. The significance and weight of words was realized in Session 2 when a student noted the use of the word “drive,” which was used to describe a dynamic quality of the movement. Although I intended the use of this word to assist in investigating movement quality choices, the potential double meaning of the word altered this students’ focus from process oriented to goal oriented. She wrote, “That changed my internal perspective. I felt impelled to move in search of ... the sense of timing lost to ambition and accomplishment. ‘Get there.’ The goal becomes more important than the exactness of the process.”

Although choosing effective words for verbal cues was important, it also frequently seemed to be as important to consider how and when I used language in class sessions. I often found my verbal cues were stimulated by my empathetic response to the

students' engagement with movement activities. This process seemed most effective when I took into account my own embodied experiences to augment my verbal cueing and leading. When I verbally cued or guided activities while also physically demonstrating, the tone and flow of my voice seemed to affect the student's engagement.

The students' contribution to the language of the course was deemed a priority when considering the importance of language in this experiential modern dance course. Students were encouraged to consider a shift in their use of language, as I was similarly considering modifications to my use of language as a teacher and facilitator. Over the eight weeks of the course, I was curious about how to develop our understanding of mindfulness in our use of language. This was approached initially through specialized writing activities that prompted students to write about movement activities, using present tense language while avoiding analysis or judgment. Additionally, students were involved in feedback discussions where neutral to affirmative thoughts and statements were shared.

Neutral statements were generally geared more toward what was seen in the movement without expressing judgment, such as like or dislike of what was witnessed. These statements were aimed at helping students find deeper meaning and understanding of movement through descriptive language without placing "right" and "wrong" judgments on their learning process. An example of a successful neutral statement made by a student was, "I see distal ends carving through space." Affirming statements (Lerman and Borstel 2003) utilize similar descriptive language but essentially lean towards complimenting others' movement experiences. An affirmation statement made was, "I appreciated the way you moved in dynamic relationship to the floor." Although

still focused on the movement, the subject of affirmations tended to be more individually focused, while neutral statements were aimed at providing verbal description to witnessed nonverbal movement experiences.

This feedback process involved discussing how this use of language changed our experiences of hearing, receiving, and giving feedback. As a community we brainstormed how to generate better neutral and affirmative statements and the students were encouraged to consider the use of neutral and affirmative thought processes in their dance practices. This use of language was helpful in considering how dance experiences can create opportunities to practice mindfulness.

Many of the interviewees in Goodnight's (2008) research indicated the difficulty of only using a verbal language to discuss nonverbal experiences. For example, Sally Fitt expressed "it is impossible to translate deep experiential work into written form," Goodnight reports (2008, 48). As I consider how I used language in every aspect of class, I began to find a deeper interest in when I did not use language. These moments seemed like opportunities for students to attend to their own thoughts and sensations without being influenced, or even perhaps interrupted by my voice. I also found the students tended to engage deeper, and what appeared to be more somatically, when I was also physically engaged in the process of moving. This has led me to appreciate the power of the nonverbal as a part of the language of teaching – one which could benefit from further investigation.

## Repetition

One theme that emerged from exploring dance as a somatic practice was the use of repetition. Repetition is a tool used in both authoritarian and somatic dance pedagogy models, which can be implemented through various means. In this somatically focused modern dance course, repeating a dance sequence multiple times over multiple sessions seemed to allow for more focus to be placed on the objectives and “how” of the steps. Repetition was used as a practice of investigating the movement to consider deeper sensations, ease, efficiency, and a mindful connection to the moment of movement. In authoritarian-based dance training, repetition can often be used as a means of achieving the “right” look of movement while enhancing habitual and mindless effort. It can also be used as a stamina and strength building tool, where quantity can be stressed to the detriment of quality. Conversely, use of repetition in this course was intended to provide opportunities to explore and enhance understanding of qualitative movement choices. Intentional rest, a common practice and principle of somatic practices, was also intended to be utilized to balance repetition of movement activities. Glenna Batson explains,

Practice (repetition for reinforcement) is a powerful training tool in dance, but is rarely counterbalanced with rest. Somatic studies commonly embed resting intervals between phases of physical activity. This high rest-to-activity ratio is designed to allow the nervous system time for processing and integration and physiological systems time to recover. (Batson and IADMS 2009, 2)

Intentional rest in this experiential modern dance course frequently took the form of one group of dancers resting while another group of movers performed the movement. This is not unlike phases of recuperation that are frequently utilized in many dance technique classes, however in this course students were also encouraged to observe or witness each other during their breaks and engage in mindful feedback opportunities. Another form of



rest occurred when students were encouraged to write about their experiences. Although these resting phases did not fully allow for a complete break from the focus of class, they did promote movement recall, body awareness, and clarity of sensation (Batson and IADMS 2009).

### Dedicated Time

Another important theme which surfaced is the need to dedicate enough time to each class activity to provide opportunities for students to dive deeper into class objectives. Johnson (1986) asserts that developing sensitivity, one of the somatic principles he delineates, takes a great deal of time. In this course, I noted if an activity was rushed due to lack of time, the students' movement potential and fulfillment seemed vague and limited. I often noted students diving deeper into activities and course objectives with fuller curiosity, commitment, and sensitivity when more time was allotted. This was noted in both set dance sequences and improvised movement explorations. I also noticed a more in-depth processing of course objectives in writing activities when more time was provided for these activities.

Delivering movement sequences with a set rhythmic phrase or timed structure while attempting to get to the "how" of the movement at times felt incongruous. Guiding vocally with an undetermined value of time seemed to provide opportunities for the students to sense and respond in movement more fully. Performing dance sequences with an imposed time or in a set rhythmical phrase, while focusing attention on sensation and movement intentions, was challenging for some students. Many of the students seemed to explore movement intentions on a deeper level of embodiment when given the

opportunity to move at their own pace. Others appeared to find set rhythmical values of time helpful in sequencing through the material as a group. Movement sequences that required the students to move at a faster tempo seemed to also challenge some students' ability to fully physicalize the movement. In Session 3, one student wrote, "I want to get into each movement but feel rushed, so I skip steps... I am torn between following the 'prescribed' steps and following my own inclinations." I continue to question as a teacher how to aid students' struggles with the full embodiment of movement while under prescribed time constraints. Time constraints and rhythmic values are frequently a reality in dance. Time and rhythmic structures, often created by music, act as external stimuli and valued aspects of the dance environment. As a result of this project, I feel the need to further consider best practices for approaching time as an element of dance embodiment. One strategy that could be helpful when prompting students to move more quickly could be to give simpler movement sequences or activities to complete at a faster pace, such as in traveling across the floor in the repetitive motion of a prance or skip.

The idea of dedicating time to practice is no stranger to modern dance. Modern dance pioneer Mary Wigman stated, "Genuine accomplishments need time to mature even in our fast-paced life" (Wigman [1927] 1998, 35). Frequently in today's world of dance, dance classes in studios and some universities are limited to 60 minutes or less to accommodate more students and likely to meet budgetary constraints. Dance teachers of the authoritarian model with a shortened class structure, may try to cram as much as possible into the class plan in the attempt to teach students as much as they can, as fast as they can. My past teaching and learning experiences have included such experiences. This fast-paced way of teaching and learning provides little time to dialogue, experience,

reflect, and consider sensations, let alone the somatic strategy of intentional rest (Burnidge 2012).

A somatic dance pedagogy model hinges on dedicating the time that is needed to allow for rich embodied learning and full investment in movement experiences. In situations where time is limited, this research suggests focusing on the quality of a few movement activities versus the quantity of movement activities in a single class session.

### Conclusion

Many authoritarian dance pedagogy strategies are adopted through copying the tendencies of our teachers. Dance teachers are often inclined to teach what they know. This often means adopting the strategies utilized by our teachers; we teach how we were taught (Burnidge 2012). Somatic dance pedagogy calls for a re-evaluation of teaching strategies. It opens the door for teachers to embrace the mystery of what they may not know and to search for and enhance the inherently somatic capacities of modern dance technique, and possibly all dance. Pedagogical strategies, along with an understanding of one's teaching philosophy, assist greatly in establishing the learning environment and student expectations. Through implementing this experimental modern dance course, I have learned that somatic dance pedagogy looks closely at the "how" and "why" of teaching and calls for continual reflection and evaluation of teaching strategies and their execution.

My process of comparing authoritarian dance pedagogy and somatic dance pedagogy practices and strategies culminated in the development of a comparison table, Table 8. This table evolved throughout the entire process of this movement project. Its

early development began during the conception of this movement project and was further established through designing and preparing to teach this experimental modern dance technique class. It was influenced by the review of literature and it continued to develop and evolve through the implementation of this course and the evaluation of my process of learning to teach a modern dance technique class that makes room for the inherently somatic nature of dance. Table 8 appears on the following page.

**How Did Implementing a Somatic Teaching Philosophy Affect My Teaching Strategies and Practices as I Worked Toward Facilitating Somatic Dance Inquiry in a Modern Dance Technique Class?**

Designing and implementing this experimental modern dance technique class allowed me to consider how and when dance is inherently somatic. It was through this process that I came to find that the learning environment, which is highly dependent on the teaching philosophy and strategies that characterize the class, is a large part of how and when dance is experienced somatically. Although having a somatic experience depends on the students' eagerness, interests, and choices in how they approach their modern dance practice, the philosophy and strategies employed by the teacher can greatly affect the students' outlook on dance and learning.

This study has made me realize, as a teacher, I am automatically placed in a position of authority; it is how I use this authority which shapes the experience for students. The somatic practice of modern dance technique is dependent on being deeply engaged and focused on personal experiences. Shifting the focus to the students' experiences creates space for the students' internal authority to be sparked while valuing

Table 8: Authoritarian vs. Somatic Dance Pedagogy Practices

<u>Authoritarian Dance Pedagogy</u>	<u>Somatic Dance Pedagogy</u>
Teacher as authority and source of knowledge. Student is passive receiver.	Individual empowered to question and seek answers. Self as a source of knowledge. Student as active seeker of knowledge.
Teacher as all-knowing and all-powerful Instruct the way I was instructed “Fix” what I see is wrong	Teacher as facilitator. Lead and provide neutral feedback from own embodied practice and empathy. Affirm what is working
Objective and external view valued “Look like I do, Do like I do” Bifurcation of mind and body	Subjective and internal judge valued Whole-self education focus
Product or result oriented, the “what”	Process oriented, the “how” The mindful process is the result
Control the body to create the “correct” external image	Dialogue with movement, honoring the internal perspective in experiencing movement efficiency
Repeat movement until it looks “right” and it requires little to no thought	Repetition is a practice of researching the movement to search for deeper sensation, ease, efficiency, and connection to the moment of movement
Pack as many movement exercises as possible into a class session	Allow time to explore, reflect, question, dialogue with movement, discuss, experience, and rest
Students are used as examples of what to do and what not to do, based on the teacher’s external perspective and values. Can create a competitive environment.	Value is placed on individual and diverse ways of understanding and experiencing movement. Students are encouraged to share their experiences to learn from each other as equal members of a community.
Teacher’s preconceived ideas and values lead discussions and corrections. Teacher’s questions direct students to “preferred” method. Language consists of short statements repeatedly stated with little dialogue or in-depth explanation	Students’ perspective honored through open-ended questioning about students’ experience. Teacher shares knowledge through unbiased lens. Teachers regularly reflect and evaluate the effectiveness of language. Language used sparingly and to guide students toward finding personal meaning in experiences.

the students' individuality and personal movement experiences, making way for somatic engagement in dance practice.

Stepping back from the role of teacher as authority meant I began to see myself more as a facilitator. I began to see that I could not "teach" the students to have an experience but I could "facilitate" and guide movement experiences that could provide opportunities for deep personal engagement. I began to see that I do not need to, nor do I have all the answers as the teacher. This shifted focus to the students' curiosities and called for them to take ownership of their learning process. This often meant when asked a question by a student, I valued the student as a source for the answers and tried to avoid projecting my opinion. I fumbled through my urge to provide all the answers as the teacher. This was not easy and felt vulnerable at times.

In embracing this vulnerability, I was reminded of how exposed I felt as a student when I started to experiment with my own deep, mindful, and holistic engagement in movement experiences. As a student, I felt even more vulnerable when feedback was delivered in a way that did not support or further empower my process. I struggled with this notion as I considered how to facilitate feedback in this class. Through studying the Liz Lerman Critical Response Process in composition settings, I have come to find affirmative statements and neutral questions help support artists in their vulnerability (Lerman and Borstel 2003). I have also found neutral thoughts and language to reflect a non-judgmental tone in mindfulness practices (Brown et al. 2007), which may provide feedback about the movement without projecting judgment on the dancer's performance or abilities. The post-movement communication process that is used in Authentic Movement between movers and witnesses, has showed me that using "I" statements and

present tense language, along with movement and sensation descriptions, can help me connect to my movement experiences as a dancer (Seereiter 2012). This process can also help us be more empathetic in our feedback responses while avoiding projecting opinions about another's movement sensations and experience.

After re-evaluating feedback processes used in authoritarian dance pedagogy, which often reflect one-way communication from teacher to student, and considering other possible avenues of inspiration for feedback, I have come to see that the feedback process in dance is a complex interweaving of communication that occurs throughout the technique class, in every moment of the class. There is a constant feedback loop that transpires both verbally and nonverbally. As I investigated somatic dance pedagogy strategies in this class, I became increasingly mindful of the students responding to my verbal and nonverbal cues as I responded to their verbal and nonverbal feedback. I have concluded through this process that teaching dance as a somatic practice is highly dependent on my ability as a facilitator to be mindfully present with my students and aware of the potential for this two-way communication.

I began to realize the potential of utilizing my own empathetic response in providing images and movement description throughout class, although at times it was difficult to find verbal language for my nonverbal impulses. I came to find when I physically practiced with the students, while at times also verbally cueing, I was able to lead from my own practice – from my own embodied source of feedback. For example, in Session 8, I sensed a greater ease and connectedness throughout the room when I made a point of attending to my own physical presence during a connected stream of warm-up exercises. I found my feedback or communication came from an embodied, internal

place versus an external or visual place. I talked less and sensed more from my own embodied practice, which seemed to provide more space for the students to engage somatically with their own practice.

The flow from one moment to the next, often through the use of my voice, also seemed to facilitate somatic engagement. Over the eight class sessions, I grew more confident in the use of my voice. I began to find I was more attuned to using my voice when I was more mindfully engaged with my own physical presence, regardless of whether or not I was physically practicing with the students. The effective use of my voice became a clear definer of providing a somatic learning environment. Taylor states,

Your voice is your seventh limb. A complex mechanism involving almost every structure in the body, it does almost everything a hand can do. It reaches toward, pushes away, soothes and caresses, grabs, and releases. It can stop an attacker almost as effectively as a blow to his head, or it can seduce a loved one with subtle strokes. Your voice, when employed effectively, can convey infinite shades of meaning and intention, and can come into space much farther than the reach of a hand – or it can hide inside your body. (2012, 58)

The above quote from Taylor points out how important it is to consider the effectiveness of our voices as teachers, as well as the influence our voices can have on students' learning experiences. In this course, how I said something became just as important as what I was saying. Taylor's words lead me to reflect on the students' voices as a frequently undervalued part of a holistic learning experience. The implementation of this experimental dance course helped me begin to realize the voice has the potential to be as much a part of a corporeal experience as any limb or body part. The voice may also encompass a function beyond serving as the instrument for vocalizing thoughts. The "voice" can act as a connector of thought and movement whether verbalized in discussion, recorded in a written form, or left to our internal dialogue. By empowering



students to seek and utilize their own voices, I now see the voice as an important connector of mind and body in approaching dance education as whole self education. Making space for dancers to use their voices, whether by vocalizing in discussion or giving language to an experience in a written format, is a necessary element of somatic dance education and the two-way communication of a somatic feedback process.

To further value the students' perspective, I tried to ask questions from a truly curious mind-frame, rather than for the purpose of directing towards my own agenda. For example, in Session 3, students were asked to engage in a lead and follow activity where the follower was led with eyes closed as the leader created movement impulses and choices for the follower through touch. Following this activity, I initiated a very open discussion by asking "How was this activity?" and "What did you notice during this activity?" Following a very full discussion by the students, I spoke to summarize what I had learned from their discussion. This included topics centered on individual movement choices, as well as finding trust in others and in the self as both the follower and leader. In that discussion we all learned a great deal about ourselves as movers and I began to see first hand how understanding qualitative movement preferences and finding trust in our movement potential could emerge as important outcomes of approaching modern dance technique as a somatic practice.

Embracing a somatic teaching philosophy affected the way I looked at teaching modern dance technique and pedagogy practices, even before I stepped foot into the studio for the first class session. My course preparation was dictated by first focusing in on the delineated principles of modern dance technique. This influenced the development of daily class objectives and course goals. Daily objectives and goals were

process oriented, meaning they were not centered on reaching an end product, but were rather oriented towards investigating and exploring targeted movement intentions.

Working with a concept model, rather than a skill or movement vocabulary driven model, further led to my understanding of modern dance technique as a process versus a product.

I questioned “how” to best facilitate an experience that could help achieve the daily objectives/goals. Specific class activities were then devised and prepared based on the objectives/goals of the day. I found the set dance movement sequences I developed in preparation for class were directly influenced by focusing first on the principles and objectives. My movement development choices changed depending on the objectives focused on for each class. The “what” began to emerge out of considering the “how.” Movement aesthetic choices seemed to begin to surface from these preparation practices.

As I implemented these lesson plans, I often found a need to divert or reorder the sequence of the planned events based on the response of the students through the progression of class. I struggled with trusting and following my instincts in the beginning phase of the course, as I felt tied to the original prepared lesson plan. Since I was adopting new practices and changes to my philosophy I was concerned that diverting from the lesson plan could mean returning to old teaching methods or habits. However, with each session that passed, I found developing my ability as a facilitator to sense and respond in the moment to the needs of the class, was a necessary element of somatic dance pedagogy; whereas, adhering to the prepared lesson plan regardless of any outcomes could be more likely considered a practice of an authoritarian-based dance pedagogy. Embracing a somatic teaching philosophy by investigating somatic pedagogy practices in an experimental modern dance technique class helped me realize how I

presented course material and activities was as important as what I presented, if not more important. Over time I began to adjust activities in response to the students' verbal and nonverbal responses. I began to re-embrace my ability to sense and respond, and the lesson plans became a road map of possible ways to consider the daily objectives and course goals.

Teaching a somatically engaging modern dance technique class meant I had to engage with my own somatic sensibilities not just in my teaching practices, but also in my awareness, observations, and continual evaluation of students and the effectiveness of the class activities. Remaining open to the process of reflecting and acting in the moment as the facilitator, became a necessary element of putting a somatic dance pedagogy philosophy into practice. For example, during Session 3, the first movement exploration took students into a very deep internal place, and although this was the intention of this exploration, I was surprised by how deeply internal the students engaged with their explorations. As we transitioned through the floor exercise and into another movement exploration that led to standing, I began to sense a need to bring attention and awareness to the external environment. I felt this would be necessary before moving into the next set dance sequence, which required the students to access their attentive observation skills. Consequently, I transitioned the students' exploration into walking through the space in different directions while asking the students to note what they saw. I then asked them to speak the name of each person they passed. If they did not remember each other's names they reintroduced themselves. This short divergence from the original plan was instrumental in re-establishing a connection to the external environment after spending a dedicated amount of time exploring the contents of the internal spaces.

As a teacher I also evaluated my use of time. I considered how much time was enough for each class activity before moving on to the next activity, valuing the quality of each movement experience over the number of exercises or activities taught. Since the implementation of this class, I now attempt to teach fewer movement exercises placing emphasis on quality, in the classes I presently teach. I also encourage deeper curiosity and investigation in the quality of movement when using repetition in class.

Rhythmical structures were occasionally established for set dance sequences throughout the course. However, in encouraging a deeper somatic engagement, I often found the need to go away from this structure to allow for individual variations. I struggled with teaching and performing set dance sequences to a rhythmical standard of time while trying to engage somatically myself. My struggle with this was shared by students at times. In Session 7, one student asked “How do we move in time and still have a fully committed and engaged experience?” This discussion revealed a need to further consider how adhering to designated rhythmical “counts” may affect one’s ability to practice dance somatically due to the external demand or image this rhythmical structure can create. I began to wonder how to better integrate rhythmical design of movement and other elements of musicality into the somatic exploration of modern dance technique. This is a topic which could greatly benefit from further investigation.

Overall, I have found to engage somatically in my modern dance technique requires the practice of mindfulness. To successfully teach modern dance technique as a somatic practice, I found I had to engage mindfully and somatically with all aspects of the class, from preparation and planning to executing and evaluating, in order to create the learning environment where students may choose to enter into somatic inquiry.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSION**

Principles of modern dance technique and pedagogical practices that emphasize the inherently somatic nature of dance were investigated, applied, and practiced in an experimental modern dance technique course as a result of this movement project. By embracing underlying principles that unite the field of somatic movement practices and considering the affects of pedagogical practices, I have uncovered possibilities for modern dance technique to be explored as a somatic practice. While the power to approach one's dance training as a somatic practice ultimately lies with the individual, I have found the learning environment to have a strong influence on the student's ability to consider how to practice dance somatically. The learning environment can reflect the teacher's philosophy and is established through implemented pedagogical strategies and practices based on underlying principles.

Practicing dance somatically first requires developing attention and awareness of the present moment, also known as mindfulness. Engaging mindfully in the modern dance technique class allows for deeper connections to holistic movement experiences. Dancers can find and understand sensation and with that can explore efficiency and ease in their movement experiences. Teaching dance as a somatic practice involves bringing attention to present moment sensations along with individuality. It also calls for continual reflection and action by adjusting in the moment to the needs of the students through listening to the students' voices and reacting empathetically to their movement experiences in providing feedback. This requires the teacher or facilitator to be in tune with his/her own sensations and embodied responses relating to the movement

experiences. I have also found that leading class from my own embodied practice and consciousness seems to create a richer, more authentic, and more engaging environment.

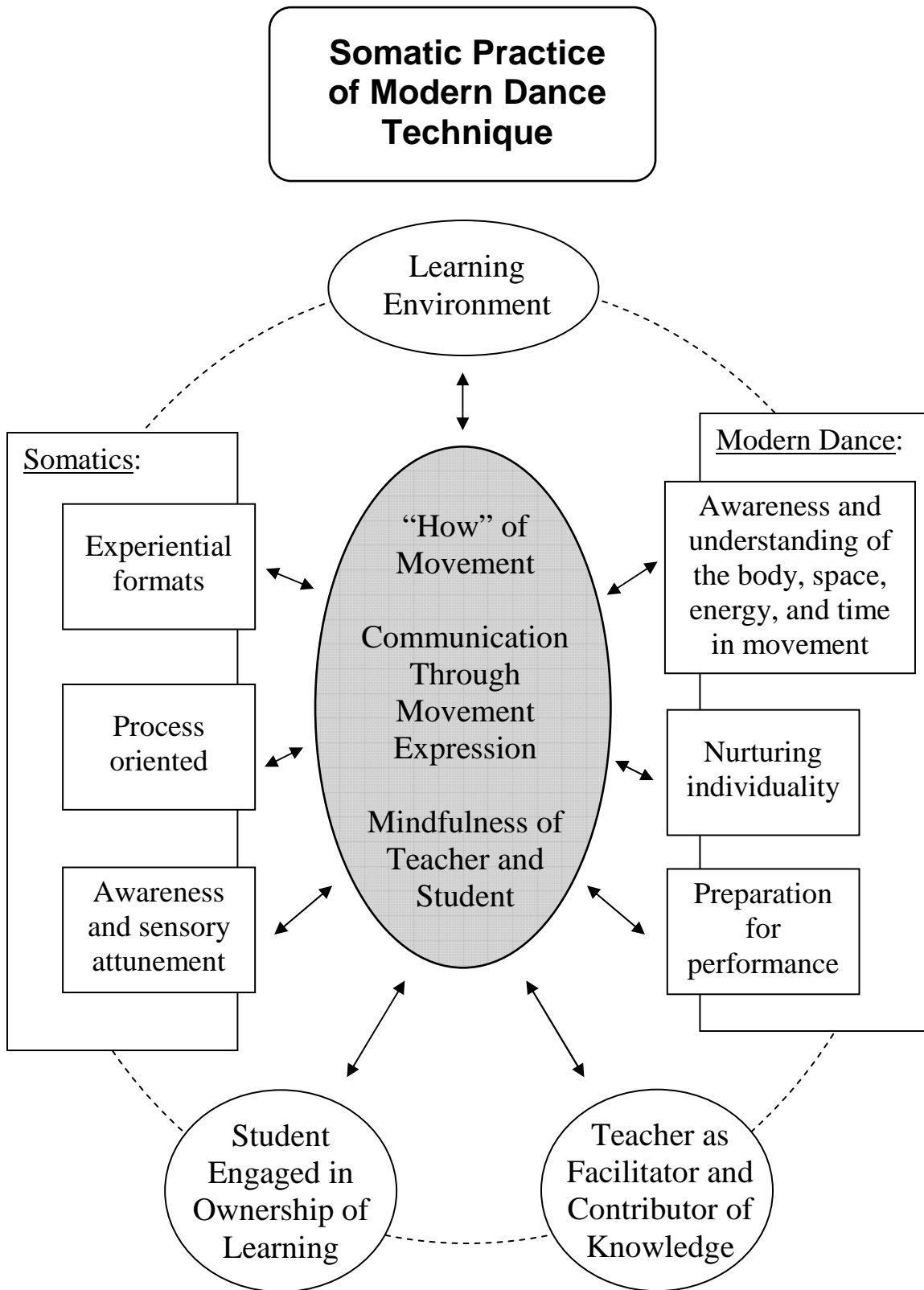
This movement project revealed a personal understanding that the role of teacher as facilitator is to guide, lead, and share the knowledge obtained from one's own rigorous study, continued practice, and ever-evolving curiosity. The role of teacher as facilitator recognizes a teacher's role is one of automatic authority. However, the role of teacher as facilitator does not demand that students address the teacher as the authority of their bodies, but rather situates the teacher as a resource for the students' understanding and growth. Further discourse and reflection has revealed the importance of recognizing the knowledge-base of the teacher as foundation for one's teaching. Whether it is in the separate fields of dance and somatics, or in combined forces, the knowledge platform of the teacher is paramount. Somatic practices are deeply rooted in theoretical concepts, scientific knowledge, and historical developments, which have ultimately made it possible to consider underlying and unifying principles of somatic movement practices. Therefore, it is not enough to merely implement the principles, practices, and strategies discussed in this document in order to practice somatic dance pedagogy. One's base of knowledge significantly contributes to both the content (the "what") and the pedagogical practices (the "how") of one's teaching.

As a result of teaching this course I have begun to re-evaluate "skill" in modern dance technique. The skills of a modern dance technique class, in my mind and practice, are no longer identified as learned steps but rather as the "how" of the movement. Embracing this process-oriented principle has changed the way I look at movement. I now see elements of a somatic sensibility in movement such as ease, efficiency, and

mindfulness to be at the heart of technical skill in modern dance. Therefore, I feel the “how” of movement is a valuable element to consider in the somatic practice of modern dance technique.

In conclusion, the somatic and modern dance technique principles I have distilled support a somatic learning environment, which is also made up of the teacher as the facilitator and a contributor of knowledge, as well as actively engaged and empowered students seeking ownership of their learning and movement experiences. I feel this movement project has revealed important components that can exist in modern dance technique, which support the somatic practice of dance. Modern dance technique and somatic movement practices can both seek experiential understanding of the process or the “how” of movement. In order to practice any form of movement somatically, I feel a key component is mindfulness. Finally, both modern dance and somatic movement practices ultimately aim to enhance communication through movement expression. In Figure 1, I aim to illustrate my enhanced understanding of the somatic practice of modern dance technique as a result of this movement project.

Figure 1: The Somatic Practice of Modern Dance Technique





## **Future Research Recommendations**

The consideration of feedback processes and how language is used by students and teachers were important emerging elements of this course. However, I feel I just started to scratch the surface of researching, implementing, and practicing alternatives to authoritarian dance pedagogy feedback methods in the eight weeks of this course. I continue to seek opportunities to further investigate and integrate developing feedback methods into my teaching endeavors. I also feel compelled to consider the language of a somatic dance class as a subject which I must continually evaluate if I am to work towards putting a somatic teaching philosophy into practice. I feel the topic of feedback and communication in the dance class is one worth further researching in order to better understand the potential contributions of feedback and communication processes in learning environments.

This research focused on the process of considering how and when the modern dance technique class can be practiced somatically, and how I as a teacher could promote this option through my teaching. It focused less on the student outcomes and the affect this class could have on a dancer's training as a whole. Further research inquiries could include consideration of how exposure to a somatic dance environment could affect a student's outlook on dance, influence class taking strategies at various levels or stages of training, be applied to performance, or lead to various levels of success in professional dance accomplishments.

The evaluation process for this project was primarily aimed at considering my progress in developing as a facilitator of somatic dance pedagogy. It would have been beneficial to have more explicitly considered the development of the dancers as part of

the process of measuring my effectiveness. To measure dancer progress and development, the dancers could have been video recorded performing a set modern dance sequence previous to the start of the course and again at the end of the term for comparison. A scale could have been devised and used for ranking the students' engagement with the principles, course aim, and goals of the course in examining student progress. Video documentation during this project was instead aimed at creating a record of the classes that could be reviewed in evaluating my development as a facilitator. The students' progress could have also been subjectively considered through a pre and post student questionnaire. In addition, it would have been beneficial to have the students write about what they have learned and how they feel they have progressed.

Although this movement project uncovered augmented rest as a component of somatic practices, the experimental modern dance technique course implemented in this project did not fully investigate this practice. Opportunities were provided for reflection, witnessing, and discussion which acted as rest cycles in this class. Although periods of rest did occur, they were not significantly focused on or fully planned with the intent of augmented rest. Further investigation of rest in dance could play an important role in enhancing the learning process of modern dance technique and would be beneficial to consider over a period of time.

The major underlying question that surfaced as a result of this research was "Can all dance forms be practiced somatically?" I have concluded that this would be highly dependent on the learning environment and students' individual approach to their training. However, it may be more difficult to apply this research to some dance idioms than others. For example, ballet is typically steeped in classical values and frequently

aligned with authoritarian dance teaching practices, which may possibly pose additional challenges to adopting a somatic teaching philosophy and the practices that would promote a somatic learning environment. Further investigations could consider how the application of somatic pedagogical practices may affect the aesthetic choices, teaching strategies, and learning of various dance idioms at a range of levels. The possible benefits of working somatically in various idioms and levels of dance should also be further examined. Furthermore, the process over product model present in somatic inquiry could benefit creative and scholarly dance research, where the development of an end product, such as this thesis document or a choreographic performance, is a necessary culmination.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This movement project has facilitated my process of embracing a somatically informed teaching philosophy through research and practice. I am still very much in the beginning of this journey. This movement project has served as a jumping off point to continue to evaluate my teaching practices. Since the commencement of this research, I have begun to search for ways to bring my developing teaching philosophy into other forms of dance and each class I teach. It is my hope that my continued pedagogical efforts and research will result in transformational educational experiences for students and myself, which have the potential to enhance deeper embodiment in dance and in life.

**APPENDIX A**  
**RECRUITMENT FLYER**



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

## **Attention Modern Dance Enthusiasts!**

Are you interested in a **FREE** opportunity to  
train in a modern dance technique class?

**What: FREE Modern Dance Technique Classes**

When: Fridays 2-4pm, Fall Term, Weeks 1-8

Where: Studio 354, Gerlinger Annex, U of O

Why: Support dance education research!

Who: Taught by Melanie Meenan

### **Project Description:**

Melanie Meenan, an MFA candidate from the Department of Dance at the University of Oregon, is seeking dedicated dance students to participate in her research study focused on the somatic exploration of modern dance technique. You're eligible to be in this study if you have had some experience in modern dance (suggested placement of level 2 or higher).

To participate or request more information email:

[mmeenan@uoregon.edu](mailto:mmeenan@uoregon.edu)

Meenan Protocol #07272012.016 Recruitment Flyer (8/15/12)

## APPENDIX B

### RECRUITMENT LETTER/EMAIL



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

Dear Modern Dance Enthusiasts,

My name is Melanie Meenan. I am an MFA candidate from the Department of Dance at the University of Oregon. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about the somatic exploration of modern dance technique. You're eligible to be in this study if you have had some experience in modern dance (suggested placement of level 2 or higher). I obtained your contact information from the University of Oregon, Department of Dance.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be participating in a FREE weekly modern dance technique class, taught by myself, Fridays 2-4pm beginning Sept 28<sup>th</sup> and running through week 8 of the Fall 2012 term. I would like to video record each class to evaluate my presentation of the course curriculum.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email me at [mmeenan@uoregon.edu](mailto:mmeenan@uoregon.edu).

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Melanie Meenan

Meenan Protocol #07272012.016 Recruitment email/letter (8/15/12)

**APPENDIX C**  
**CONSENT FORM**



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

**University of Oregon Department of Dance**  
**Informed Consent for Participation as a Subject in:**  
**Exploring the Modern Dance Technique Class as a Somatic Practice**  
**Investigator: Melanie Meenan**  
**Adult Consent Form**

**Introduction**

- You are being asked to be in a research study as a student of a modern dance technique class which will explore modern dance training as a somatic practice.
- You were selected as a possible participant because you have had some modern dance experience.
- I ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

**Purpose of Study:**

- The purpose of this study is to investigate an approach to dance pedagogy which may facilitate a somatic experience for modern dance students through the development of a modern dance technique class curriculum.
- The total number of subjects is expected to be 10-25.

**Description of the Study Procedures:**

- If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things: attend and participate regularly in the modern dance technique class held weekly during the first eight weeks of the 2012 fall term on the University of Oregon campus [Fridays 2-4pm, Gerlinger Annex] participate in occasional in-class discussions, and complete occasional in-class writing explorations.
- Each class will be video documented for project evaluation purposes.

**Risks/Discomforts of Being in the Study:**

- There are no reasonable foreseeable (or expected) risks. This study may include risks that are unknown at this time.

Meenan

07272012.016

Participant Consent Form

7/26/12

Page 1 of 3



**Benefits of Being in the Study:**

- The purpose of the study is to investigate an approach to dance pedagogy which may facilitate a somatic experience for dance students through the development of a modern dance technique class curriculum.
- The benefits of participation may include free participation in a modern dance technique class with the potential for individual growth as a modern dancer.

**Payments:**

- No payment will be provided for participating in this study.

**Costs:**

- There is no cost to you to participate in this research study.

**Confidentiality:**

- The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I may publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records will be kept in a locked file.
- All electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file. Video recordings may be viewed by me and my project committee and will be used for educational purposes only.
- Access to the records will be limited to the researchers; however, please note that regulatory agencies, and the Institutional Review Board and internal University of Oregon auditors may review the research records.

**Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal:**

- Your participation is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect your current or future relations with the University.
- You are free to withdraw at any time, for whatever reason.
- There is no penalty for not taking part or for stopping your participation.

**Dismissal From the Study:**

- The investigator may withdraw you from the study at any time for the following reasons: (1) withdrawal is in your best interests (e.g. side effects or distress have resulted), (2) you have failed to comply with the study requirements, or (3) the study sponsor decides to terminate the study.



**Contacts and Questions:**

- The researcher conducting this study is Melanie Meenan. For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact her via email at mmeenan@uoregon.edu.
- If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact: Research Compliance Services, University of Oregon at (541) 346-2510 or ResearchCompliance@uoregon.edu

**Copy of Consent Form:**

- You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records and future reference.

**Statement of Consent:**

- I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to participate in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form.

**Signatures/Dates**

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**Study Participant (Print Name)**

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**Participant Signature**

**Date**



## APPENDIX D

### LESSON PLANS

#### Class Session 1

##### Objectives:

- Bring awareness to the present moment, sensations, and thoughts
- Become more aware of body systems and structures in support of movement
- Enhance sensations of weight and gravity in relationship to the floor
- Explore imagery in relationship to weight, gravity, and the floor

##### Class Activities:

- Introduction & Consent Forms
- Writing Activities
  - How do you feel in this moment?
  - What are your intentions or goals for today?
  - What are your intentions for the next eight weeks, during this course?
  - What are your intentions or goals for dancing? Why do you dance?
- Body Scan bringing attention to skin, muscles, bones, joints, fluids, organs
- Floor Exercise
- Movement Exploration
  - Explore/improvise movement focusing on skin, muscles, bones, joints, fluids, organs
- Repeat Floor Exercise while focusing on one/two of the above
- Transition to standing considering connection to floor
- Space & Names
  - Walk through space; what do you see?
  - Meet someone learn their name and something about them
  - Continue walking, vocalize what you learned about others while walking
- Standing Combination
- Movement Exploration: explore relationship to floor/gravity through imagery
  - Sand/water/air (Franklin)
  - Discuss images
- Repeat Standing Combination with an image
- Writing activity (Cooper, 2011; Fraleigh, 1998; Seereiter, 2012)
  - Embodied/phenomenological
  - Relive movement experiences
  - Write in present tense
- Final combination explored in own time

##### Evaluation:

- Look for changes in movement qualities during explorations
- Assess if or when students appear to be present in movement experiences
- Consider weight transfers and ability to yield and push

- Gauge comfort level and willingness of participants through all activities
- Look for integration of explored objectives in set sequences
- Assess outcomes of students' writing activities

## Class Session 2

### Objectives:

- Explore and sense diverse and dynamic relationships to the floor
- Enhance awareness of body and space
- Enhance awareness of community

### Class Activities:

- Writing Activities
  - Recall your experience following class last week. This could be an event sensation, thought, or feeling.
  - How do you define modern dance technique today in this moment?
  - How do you feel in this moment?
  - What are your intentions for today?
- Names & Hands Circle
- Traveling improvised exploration of the floor
- Floor exercise from Session 1; add on
  - With verbal cueing, no counts
  - With  $\frac{3}{4}$  rhythmical structure
- Movement exploration:
  - Scan body in relationship to floor
  - Explore relationship to floor in level changes
    - Heavy/Light
    - Yield/Push
    - Sand imagery
- Standing combination from Session 1
- Writing Activities:
  - Write about the present moment or about a previous moment in the present tense, as if it is happening right now, without judgment or analysis
  - What relationships with the floor have you explored today? Consider questions you have about your relationship to the floor. Describe relationships to floor considering sensations.
- Weight Shift Combination
  - Practice with partner
- Movement exploration:
  - Walk, See, Describe – short spatial awareness exploration
- Return to Weight Shift Combination
- Discuss relationships explored with the floor
- Final Combination from Session 1
- Discussion
  - Consider relationship to your environment throughout next week

Evaluation:

- Assesses changes in yield and push, dynamic relationship with floor, sense of weight
- Assess if or when students appear to be present in movement experiences
- Gauge comfort level and willingness of participants through all activities
- Look for integration of explored objectives in set sequences
- Assess outcomes of students' writing activities

Class Session 3

Objectives:

- Consider internal and external spaces/environments
- Become aware of contents and container
- Connect inner experiences with outer stimuli
- Enhance awareness of sensation, body, mind and environment

Class Activities:

- Body scan
  - Consider how you feel. What do you notice? Where is your mind? What are you thinking about?
  - Set an intention for the day
  - Notice your breath
  - Note how breath changes/moves your contents and container
- Movement Exploration:
  - Internal structures in relationship to external
  - Relationship between contents and container and environment
  - Shift focus from inner to outer and outer to inner
  - Ball & X variations to consider inner relationship to outer environment
- Floor exercise from Session 2
  - Explore exercise considering contents and container and relationship to environment in own time
  - Repeat with  $\frac{3}{4}$  rhythmical structure
- Movement Exploration:
  - Transition to standing to exploring relationship of contents and container with floor and space in different levels
  - Walk through space
    - Forwards, backwards, use eyes to see each other and space
    - Say name of people you pass
- Standing Combination from Session 2 with small change and more specific counts
  - Repeat in groups while witnessing/observing
- Movement Exploration: Lead/follow partner activity
  - Explore/investigate/sense structure of partner
  - Create movement in partner as initiator
  - Discuss experience

- Weight Shift Combination; add on
  - Dance in groups while observing/witnessing
  - Affirmations/neutral observations (Lerman and Borstel, 2003)
  - Repeat considering your own neutral observations as you go through the movement
- Writing Activities
  - Describe previous movement experience from beginning to end with present tense language, as if it is happening now
  - Consider sensations. How does the movement feel?
- Relaxation Activity

Evaluation:

- Look for moments of connecting to self, others, and surroundings
- Look for changes in movement qualities during explorations
- Assess if or when students appear to be present in movement experiences
- Gauge comfort level and willingness of participants through all activities
- Look for integration of explored objectives in set sequences
- Assess outcomes of students' writing activities

Class Session 4

Objectives:

- Enhance awareness of environment
- Bring attention to information received through the senses
- Further foster a sense of community
- Begin to consider qualities of movement, feedback processes, and thought process while dancing

Class Activities:

- Check-in discussion
- Standing reference/body scan
- Movement Exploration:
  - “Sensing the Environment” (Brodie and Lobel 2004, 82)
  - Describe to self what you see, sense, or experience in the moment
  - Partner touch conversations
- Floor Exercise, repeated from previous lessons
  - Repeat emphasizing or considering objectives covered so far in term
- Body Scan & Movement Exploration:
  - Describe your position on the floor to your self. How does it feel, where are you, what is your shape?
  - Change position and repeat process
  - Flow through positions/movement with maximum curiosity and awareness of each present moment
  - Space exploration (Koner, 1993)

- Area of solitude (inner/internal focus), area of stage (bring awareness to larger area of space which may include other dancers), area of auditorium, area of horizon and sky
- Standing Combination from previous sessions
  - Clarify timing and questions about movement sequence
- Weight Shift Combination from previous sessions
- Combine Standing and Weight Shift Combinations
  - Practice in groups
  - Group observations/witnessing
    - Describe what you see
    - Discuss using affirmations/neutral responses
- Movement Exploration:
  - Witnessing Partner Activity
    - Move from impulse for 2 min. while partner witnesses
    - Partner responds through movement in likeness for 2 min.
    - Witnessing requires observing with whole self – mind and body
  - Moving from impulse while witnessing self
- Writing Activity:
  - Write about above self witnessing movement experience using present tense language to describe movement and sensations

#### Evaluation:

- Consider the language used by students and by myself in feedback
- Look for moments of connecting to self, others, and surroundings
- Look for changes in movement qualities during explorations
- Assess if or when students appear to be present in movement experiences
- Gauge comfort level and willingness of participants through all activities
- Look for integration of explored objectives in set sequences
- Assess outcomes of students' writing activities

#### Class Session 5

#### Objectives:

- Continue to consider present moment of movement and sensation
- Explore initiating & sequencing
- Enhance language articulation of movement descriptions and neutral feedback

#### Class Activities:

- Check-in discussion and writing
  - What does it mean to be somatic?
- Writing activity
  - Perform a body scan
  - Write in present tense about scan
    - Consider how you feel and what you sense

- Movement Exploration
  - Explore and consider walking
  - Explore, identify, initiate from distal ends
  - Explore movement of proximal joints of elbows and knees
  - Explore movement of shoulders and hips
  - Explore movement of the spine
  - Reverse order considering how initiating from each of these points can affect the rest of you
  - Free explorations of initiating points leading into traveling
- Floor Exercise from previous sessions; add on
  - Explore in own time considering initiation points
- Heal rocks – initiation and sequence through
- Repeat floor exercise in time after discussing initiation points
- Transition to standing with yield and push from hands and feet, then roll up through spine
- Standing & Weight Shift Combinations Combined
  - Repeat considering initiation points
  - Perform in groups for partner
    - Consider deeper level of observing/witnessing, use empathetic response (Seereiter, 2012)
    - Provide partner with neutral/affirmative responses
- Across the Floor Combination
  - Repeat while initiating from distal ends
  - Repeat while initiating from spine/core
- New center combination
  - After learning, repeat considering present moments, emphasize neutral thoughts
- Writing Activity
  - Write in present tense about last movement exercise
  - Use descriptive language, describing previous movement experience from beginning to end as if is happening right now

Evaluation:

- Look for moments of initiation and sequencing
- Consider students use of language, description, feedback
- Assess if or when students appear to be present in movement experiences
- Gauge comfort level and willingness of participants through all activities
- Look for integration of explored objectives in set sequences
- Assess outcomes of students' writing activities

Class Session 6

Objectives:

- Enhance awareness of the spine and spinal movements in relationship to structure
- Investigate spirals and joints in considering 3 dimensionality of movement

- Consider movement dynamics, initiation, sequencing through partner activity
- Enhance awareness of inner and outer focus

Class Activities:

- Movement Exploration:
  - Explore rolling of joints and entire body
  - Explore 3-dimensionality of joints
  - Explore initiating and sequencing in spiral from “X”
  - Explore head and tail connection in Ball & “X”
  - Explore ease and mobility in joints
- Introduce new floor exercise
- Explore spinal movement
  - Consider inner and outer focus (Hackney, 1998; Koner, 1993)
  - Transition to new levels and standing
- Standing Combination
  - Focusing on spine and inner/outer focus
- Introduce new weight shift exercise
- Across the floor sequence from Session 5
- Movement Exploration:
  - Lead & Follow touching partner exercise
    - Use touch to give partner points to initiate movement from
    - Consider changing dynamic of how partner is moving
  - Leader step back and allow Follower to move on his/her own
- Final combination from Session 5
  - Inner/outer focus

\*\*shortened class due to department performance

Evaluation:

- Look for initiation and sequencing in spine
- Gauge ability to use touch to create initiation, sequencing, and dynamics
- Assess if or when students appear to be present in movement experiences
- Gauge comfort level and willingness of participants through all activities
- Look for integration of explored objectives in set sequences

Class Session 7

Objectives:

- Explore breath, 3-dimensionality, spiral, spine, and joints
- Explore imagery, movement qualities and dynamic range

Class Activities:

- Writing activity
  - How do you feel right now?

- Describe a salient/happy/thoughtful/enjoyable/pleasurable movement memory
- What is your intention for today?
- Movement Exploration:
  - Explore breath, rolling, and spine
- Floor exercise from Session 6
  - Repeat in own time focusing on breath
- Seated breath exploration into transition to standing
- Standing Combination
  - Faster tempo; with breath focus
- Movement Exploration
  - Walking scan & joint exploration
- Weight shift exercise from Session 6
- Across the floor combination from Session 6
- Movement Exploration:
  - Explore movement imagery
- Repeat across floor combination
  - With different images/qualities from exploration
    - Consider which is easiest and most difficult
- Final combination from Session 6; add on
  - Considering objectives from course
  - Perform in groups; observe/witness
- Writing activity
  - Describe a movement memory from class today
    - Write in present tense as if you are reliving the movement memory right now
    - Use descriptive words; give the experience language
- Feedback discussion
  - How do we give neutral and/or affirmative feedback?

Evaluation:

- Look for changes in movement qualities and dynamics
- Consider the effect of imagery on movement
- Assess if or when students appear to be present in movement experiences
- Gauge comfort level and willingness of participants through all activities
- Look for integration of explored objectives in set sequences
- Assess outcomes of students' writing activities

Class Session 8

Objectives:

- Integration of ideas
- Bring awareness to ownership of dance technique
- Consider trust, acceptance, and presence



- Enhance understanding of mindfulness
- Expand awareness of community

Class Activities:

- Writing Activity
  - How do you define *your* modern dance technique?
  - How do you define somatic practice?
- Look back at individual writings from earlier classes
- Explorative warm-up with floor exercise embedded
  - Focus on present moment, neutral thoughts
  - Lead from my own practice
- Standing exercise as group in rhythmic sequencing
- Movement Exploration:
  - Explore feet articulating with ground
- Repeat standing exercise with individual exploration and own sense of time
- Movement initiation partner exercise
  - Leader & Follower
  - Leader & Responder
  - Both Lead & Follow; Both Responders
  - Switch roles and switch partners between each layer of the exercise
- Weight Shift Combination
  - Perform with rhythmic sequencing in groups
  - Perform in own sense of time
- Short across the floor traveling sequence
- Final combination from week 7
- Writing Activity
  - Relive experience from beginning to end in present tense
  - Read through and consider what you wrote
- Repeat final combination
- Hands & Names Closing circle

Evaluation:

- Consider care, awareness, and support of each other
- Assess if or when students appear to be present in movement experiences
- Gauge comfort level and willingness of participants through all activities
- Look for integration of explored objectives from the term
- Assess outcomes of students' writing activities

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