

DANCING SOLUTIONS TO CONFLICT

Field-tested Somatic Dance for Peace

OVERVIEW

Dance serves as an integrated expression of the unified body and mind, communicating both ideas and emotions (Author 1992; Buckroyd 2001). Emotions can be harmonious or they can be the messengers of conflict. This article describes how dance can be part of solving conflict in positive ways and also shares how sophisticated knowledge of body awareness – somatic education – by dance educators can enhance this process. Examples included are from the author’s personal experience of observing veteran dance educators working with middle and high school youth in school or after-school dance classes, clubs and programs. Many of these observations were part of cross-case qualitative research spanning five cities in the United States. Further examples come from the author’s experience in teaching professional development workshops and higher education courses at Workplace #1, #2 and #3, and from guiding special workshops with youth in schools.

The author engaged in research seeking to learn how to incorporate embodied strategies and movement activities besides “role plays” in the teaching of conflict resolution. In the 1990s role-plays were the only active whole body activities in most conflict resolution and violence prevention programs (Lam 1989). A generative chapter in 2010 described a research methodology for finding out how movement, martial arts, sports or dance could be integrated into peace education. It began with locating six expert teachers who were judged by their peers as excellent mentors who were teaching violence prevention (Author 1998, 2010). Each teacher used some form of movement education as a primary teaching tool in her or his efforts to teach youth to resolve conflicts peaceably.

The research used triangulation of observation notes (recorded and transcribed), document review of curricular materials and multiple interviews with the teacher experts as is traditional in qualitative cross-case study (Fetterman 1989; Powdermaker 1966).

Since the time of that research the author has integrated the dance strategies observed and tactics deduced into professional development courses for dance educators, direct student services in dance, and artistic works. Three examples of strategies used are: having students create tableaux about conflict situations (Example #1), creating movement vignettes about feeling connected or disconnected (Example #2) and writing personal stories and choreographing dances about the conflicts (Example #3). A key goal in training teachers, administrators and para-professionals has been to teach useful strategies, such as these three, but also to sensitize adults to any internalized stress they may hold and to actively build empathy for students' lives, including their conflicts (Author 1998, 2002, 2010).

In sharing how somatic awareness contributes to dance approaches to conflict resolution, the first points to address are “What is somatic awareness?” and “What is somatic dance”? *Soma* is a Greek word, still used in Greece today that refers to the “living body”, as opposed to “a body” which can be dead or alive. Thomas Hanna coined the term *somatics* to describe a process of gaining knowledge from paying attention to the living body (Hanna 1993), and thereby consciously using the mind to make meaning of the body's signals (Author 2009). Somatic education explores bodily movement while engaging proprioceptive and kinesthetic senses (Brodie and Lobel 2006). Through simultaneous or sequential reflection the dancer is asked to also notice the role of the mind

in engaging with these bodily experiences (Author 1994; Bales and Nettle-Fiol 2008; Batson and Miller 2014). In short, somatic awareness involves paying attention to body sensations, perceptions and related emotions, and thus is an inroad to holism, through the body-mind connection (Author 2009).

PREPARATORY ACTIVITY

[Could be positioned as a figure if desired]

1. Reflection:

Think about people who have provided you with inspiration or mentorship in your teaching and/or people you would love to be mentored by. Select one. Reflect on what was inspiring about this mentor and note whether you consider your selected mentor as cooperative or authoritarian or a combination in his or her teaching style.

2. Setting the Context:

Identify and write down at least three interpersonal conflicts that have happened or are happening in your school or dance studio. If you have no teaching experience, select conflicts from when you were a student.

Arrange these conflicts along a continuum from bad to worse, with the worst being the conflict you experience as most troublesome. Notice which conflicts involve only one incident and which are ongoing. Also feel free to note, for each incident, if it was predominantly a social, psychological or physical stress to you.

3. Self-Assessment:

What was your role in these incidents? Were you a bystander, an active participant, an instigator or the target? Take a moment to write about how you responded to the least

intense and the most intense conflicts.

Reflect on these responses: How did you verbally respond? How did you physically respond? What physical sensations did you feel? What emotions? What was similar and what was different about your behavior in each situation.

4. Connecting with Resources:

If you could discuss these incidents with your mentor(s) what advice do you imagine you would receive? Write down this advice. Does this advice have a spirit of collaboration or authority in it? Note how the input makes you feel. Register that feeling as an emotion and also as physical sensation.

Do you now have other ideas for how you might interact if you were to find yourself in your most intense and your least intense conflicts again?

Conflict Resolution in Schools, Movement and Dance as a Resource

Creative approaches to conflict resolution are helpful in everyday life. They can also serve educators in work settings. In school settings physical conflict is rampant. For instance amongst K-12 age students major causes of “fights” in school begin as an accidental bump in a cafeteria or hallway, one’s property being disrespected or another non-verbal form of being “dissed”. These “small” incidents easily escalate when students are under stress or have a history of bullying or victimization. Creative approaches to dance can help not only to resolve incidents but also can teach participants how to avoid conflict in the future. It is especially satisfying when the outcome of a dance exchange or performance by students also helps to eliminate tensions within the school or the

surrounding neighborhood. Examples of this have been recorded in Oakland, CA (Author 1998) Williamsburg Brooklyn (Author 1998), Columbus, Ohio (Unrau 2000) San Paolo (Author 2002), and Jaffa (Linden 2014).

Why Include Socio-Emotional Learning in Your Teaching:

To Be Authoritarian or Not?

Teacher modeling of how to lead groups using a high quotient of social-emotional intelligence (Goleman 1995) is an important tool in teaching and critical when engaging in creative conflict resolution (Lantieri 2009). Nel Noddings (2003) writes about the importance of caring in schools. The entire Socio-Emotional Learning field has produced data that shows that classroom climate improves when teachers use their own positive socio-emotional intelligence. Children's academic performance has been shown to increase as well (Durlak, Domitrovich, Weissberg, and Gullota 2015)

Taking care to model compassion when teaching can have profound impact, especially in those dance environments that still incorporate "old school" dance teaching methods. Historically, dance studio training and even some dance classes in higher education thrived on an authoritarian model of leadership, sometimes referred to as "old school" methodology. Indeed these methods are not totally gone, nor is it completely atypical for students to experience humiliation in dance classes. However, with conscious focus even competitive dance programs can be restructured to also be inclusive, caring and empowering rather than demeaning. They can be respectful, safe and become vehicles of peace. One example is the recent evolution of Dancing Classrooms – American Ballroom Theatre's school-age curricula created by Pierre Dulaine and Yvonne Marceau

that includes competitive dance but seeks to do so while teaching constructs from moral education (e. g., being composed, polite, gracious). The program has been measuring its ability to improve socio-emotional intelligence (2014). It has been posited that modeling contributes to increasing socio-emotional intelligence in students (Author 1998).

Teacher Modeling: A Key to Effectiveness

A major finding of the author's study of expert teachers who used movement to teach conflict resolution and violence prevention was the special way in which these teachers taught their course content. Content topics ranged from social studies, gun laws, physical education, basketball coaching, dance technique and choreography/physical theatre. The teaching techniques that these exemplary movement/dance teachers used were called Teaching Tactics (Author 1998, 2010). The Teaching Tactics of the experts observed were:

1. Engage student opinion and ideas
2. Solicit feelings;
3. Provide choices;
4. Strive to include all people, ideas and diverse student experiences;
5. Organize aspects of the class around team work;
6. Take a holistic approach (values movement of the body as well as sharpening of the mind);
7. Acknowledge complex issues and feelings;
8. Model all of the above (e.g., own vulnerability and team work);
9. Make synthesizing statements (e.g., regarding rationales or meaning making);

10. Go the extra mile to develop relationships with students (provides additional activities, spends extra time inside and outside of class with students having challenges);
11. Counter the media (teachers note that media messages often are highly violent and that students come to school in “hyper” states);
12. Model positive conflict resolution, teaches basic conflict resolution skills, and
These tactics included discussion time that provided students with the opportunity to debate the teaching methods and also to practice resolving conflicts peacefully.

The author has since employed these traits to helping teachers to strengthen their toolbox adding to the attributes of great teaching described by Alfie Kohn (1996), Mark Goldberg (2003), among others.

Morals and Values in Excellent Teaching

The Teaching Tactics listed above dovetail with the *values* of Workplace #1 as they have been taught for over a dozen years. This model of dance pedagogy centers in socio-emotional intelligence, using the metaphor of the teacher’s heart (Insert Figure 1).¹

Workplace #1 and these Teaching Tactics indicate the possibility of further positive outcomes. In researching the emergence of these Teaching Tactics numerous additional findings were discovered through the triangulated method (Author 1998).

- 1) Expert teachers engaged with the tactics regularly.
- 2) These lessons led to an increase of a student's motivation to take action, even in the face of what may have seemed like hopeless, constant, random and/or targeted violence and abuse

[Removed for author identity.]

- 3) The teachers helped students feel strong enough to act from their own sense of principle and capability. This strength was further bolstered by the connection to others that was fostered by engaging in movement activities together.
- 4) The holistic approaches within these Teaching Tactics included movement plus moral development or values education, and in some cases involved the teaching of kinesthetic empathy.
- 5) The six expert educators studied related their lessons to real situations. Movement activities were observed to support “real learning” in that they provided the contexts for “transfer of knowledge”, opportunities to practice conflict resolution skills. In the process of skill-building, personal expression, and collaborative activity students learned how to productively resolve real conflicts that were occurring and to de-escalate tensions.

With these findings as incentive and the positive social-emotional climate present at the Workplace #1 the author delivered trainings in numerous formats: once a week for 12 weeks, weekend intensives, and a series of weekends. No matter what the format, each year more somatic approaches have been added to the course. Having conflict resolution skills is helpful for any type of teacher. Combining skilled conflict resolution with somatic awareness can be of powerful.

“CAPS”: “Traditional” CONFLICT RESOLUTION
A Traditional Negotiating Tool for Problem Situations & A Movement Model

CAPS stands for:

COOL DOWN
AGREE TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM
POINTS OF VIEW
SOLVE THE PROBLEM

Movement Model:

As part of teaching in Workplace #2 – the CAPS model was merged by the author with various MOVEMENT activities (Author, 2002). As examples:

COOL DOWN – BREATHE deeply and fully, emphasizing the exhale.

AGREE TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM – BOW to your partner or contestant before engaging in dissecting the conflict or any negotiations (verbally or through dance).

POINTS OF VIEW – DANCE YOUR STORY – this can involve the technique developed by the author described below, or through still pictures/tableaus or in any movement dialogue you set up.

SOLVE THE PROBLEM – CREATE A DANCE TOGETHER – this can take at least two forms:

- 1) Create a dance that confronts the content of the conflict and discover potential resolutions – the rule is no physical contact as students act out the conflict. Remind them that the goal is a peaceful solution even if it involves agreeing to disagree; or
- 2) Engage in a positive challenge together as well as in excitement about a shared outcome/product. (The process of being creative together serves as a form of community building based on appreciation for shared endeavors, often despite differing points of view) (Author 2010).

School Shootings and Post-9/11 Conditions – Dancing with the Chaos:

The Columbine crises and ensuing rash of shootings in schools and “9/11” have demonstrated the need for teachers to receive training to deal with issues of violence. The Columbine shooting forced the issue that teachers may have to deal with traumas in the school-building. With this it became clear to the author that the integration of even more somatic skills would benefit any attempts to teach embodied forms of conflict resolution. Over the years schools have either become more stressful environments or administrators

are more aware of the need to protect students and teachers from the violence in their communities and in the media. The attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 highlighted this need further.

Three schools and their family communities near the World Trade Center were traumatized by the events of 9/11 and continued to experience distress as they were displaced from their school buildings for many months. The author participated in Workplace #4 – a team that worked with educational administrators and teachers at Ground Zero to overcome the trauma of 9/11 as well as the everyday stressors of working in one of the world's larger public school systems. As part of this work she gave lectures on why movement is important in dealing with stress, as well as offering gentle movement classes, and workshops on how to integrate movement and body awareness to dealing with conflict.

Teachers today need to be trained to deal with complex emotional situations and have resources for dealing with fear, chaos and/or confusion. This is true of dance educators too. Using an authoritarian style is one of arbitrating a situation (making top-down decisions). However emotional safety increases with community building across all sectors of a school. In the classroom emotional safety and respect is often successfully established by creating group agreements through discussion with all members of the community – this means that all students voices are acknowledged by the teachers as long as everyone is being respectful of one another. Creating community agreements aligns with a constructivist style of education. While an authoritarian system creates excellent control amongst students this control does not often hold into after-school and recess hours (recess at school), nor will it hold up when a school is under stress. During crises,

the need for administrators and teachers to “think on their feet” is intense. Improvisational abilities amongst dance educators are useful tools in taking classroom or even school-wide leadership during crises. Teachers feel more ready when they have explored the role of improvisation in expressing emotions and creating structure. New models for being social-emotionally sensitive and resourceful under stress come from holistic paradigms. One of the most prevalent holistic models within in dance pedagogy is that of somatic education. This paradigm values self-regulation, staying alert but relaxed, and it works well together with those schools that value cooperation, horizontal leadership, creativity and improvisation.² Somatic training enhances observation skills; teachers are often more observant. They also become acutely aware of all other types of perceptual cues. They are well positioned to respond quickly and sense tensions earlier. They also have more skills to remain calm during crises (2005).

SOMATIC EDUCATION: DEEPENING THE HOLISTIC MODEL

Common tools of somatic education have been identified as movement, vocalization, skilled touch and discussion (McHugh 2006; Author 2004). These tools are used to access five Core Somatic Processes (Author & Williamson, and Webber 2014; Author 2014) deduced from a cross-case analysis of 36 different somatic movement education systems. They are: 1) slowing down to feel, 2) relaxing into gravity to release tension, 3) breathing, 4) experiencing the full 3-dimensionality of the human body (ideally in good posture) and 5) exploring new movement sequences/coordination/phrasing

² It can be posited that *taking a holistic approach* is a natural by-product of movement education, since disciplines that use movement naturally educate the mind and the body as a single integrated entity – the soma.

(Author 2014).

The BodyMind Connection in Conflict: Homeostasis

Conflict generally creates stress and this stress is always registered in the body (Goleman 1995; Lantieri, 1998; Selye 1974, 1978). Therapists aware of the mind-body connection observe that with each mental stress there is often a physical counterpart. In working with abuse and trauma the psychophysical impact of an overwhelming, under-supported situation is noted. Anywhere along the continuum of stress, conflict, abuse, to trauma, movement is a key to regulating the body. A key to regulating the physiological aspects of the body is *by developing* the resilience to return to homeostasis quickly.

Homeostasis is the relaxed physical condition where the heart and breath rate returns to a resting rate. Homeostasis supports sustainable health when a person can self-regulate and access it rapidly. Movement made conscious through somatic awareness expedites this process of regulation by bringing attention to both the habitual negative responses and the potential new positive behavioral choices. Dance, and somatic dance in particular, includes music, imagery, rhythm, coordination and comraderie – all important features in relaxation and feeling supported by others. Dance, when infused with somatic awareness, can further impact physiological imbalances (Author 2015; Batson and Wilson 2014; Batson and International Association for Dance Medicine and Science 2009; Halprin 2000; Berrol 1992; Williamson 2010).

A somatic approach to responding to stress is to teach the skills to remain calm, or to be able to return to calm easily. The physiological signs of stress include increased heart rate, bronchial dilation and related increased breathing rate, increased blood

pressure, cold hands and feet, and sweaty palms, accompanied by high levels of adrenaline and cortisol. Additional somatic indicators along the continuum from stress to trauma also include held body areas – locked positioning (freeze response), flaccid or receded body areas (passive weight and retreated, sunken, or hollowed shape), and/or no emotional expression at all, or extremes in affect.

A healthy physiological baseline can be established by good lifestyle habits – getting 7-8 hours of sleep, maintaining hygiene, eating well and exercising. It is further supported by deepening connections with healthy and supportive relationships, engaging in satisfying work and periods of rest, and ideally some type of mindful contemplative practice (e.g. religious, spiritual, creative or recreational activity). Sadly, thousands if not millions of children come to school each morning without these basic needs met. They are tired, hungry and lacking in regular exercise. Some experience their homes as places of physical or psychological abuse, or simply chronically noisy or chaotic. Conflict resolution programming that incorporates somatic approaches is designed to help children become more peaceful and classrooms more peaceable, by practicing awareness and bodily self-regulation. Activities from somatic education are well suited for this additional challenge, especially because somatic activities can help re-establish homeostasis. For instance, a primary regulator of human behavior is breath. Breathing slowly and deeply relaxes the fight/flight/freeze response. A person who has become anxious from whatever type of situation can find calm through slowing the breath, usually by deepening exhalations. There is also the observation that when stress is reduced, relaxation is supported and homeostasis is established less escalated conflict occurs. People are able to act calmly despite stressful “triggers” that may be occurring throughout the day. This is

particularly potent in the case of bullying (Hunt, 2013; McCormick 2011)

Additional Somatic Markers of Stress and Conflict

What are the somatic movement markers of stress that could also indicate the need for this somatic approach? These are among the more obvious signals:

Pacing and fidgeting (often related to anxiety);

Hyperactive behavior;

Unusual eye movements – The gaze may be fixed or hypermobile;

Uncontrolled swinging, stamping, throwing or hitting;

Lack of personal boundaries – (e.g., bumping into people, unable to say no verbally or non-verbally).

Applications in School: Somatic Awareness and Dance Approaches

The triggers of stress can arise from the self or come from someone or some situation outside. A chronic baseline of stress (inability to return to homeostasis) can lead to anxiety, panic or other mental imbalances. Stressful behaviors may arise most often when a child is feeling physically or emotionally unsafe (Frank 2001). Children with disabilities are often the victims of bullying and are can become extremely stressed by the process of attempting to learn in an emotionally unsafe environment. Don Hellison spoke of teachers creating an “island of decency” at school. He did so in the gymnasium. This can be transferred to the classroom or dance studio (Hellison, 1995; D. Hellison, personal communication, November 2, 2002). Teachers can be trained to be able to help children to modulate the degree to which they feel anxious, as well as support the experience of safety in the school environment (Bothmer 2011; Lantieri 1998; Lantieri and Patti 1996; Lantieri

2014.). Of course if a school environment is stressful to the teacher this makes the situation much more challenging.

What dance educators (and educators trained in movement) can do:

Picture conflict as a form of overstimulation. The body is dis-regulated and ripe for extreme or frozen responses. Helping students, colleagues and oneself regulate the nervous system contributes to calmer people, and in turn the overall group atmosphere can be more peaceful.

What strategies can movement and dance educators bring to these conditions?

Somatic experiences help regulate the brain, spinal cord and overall status of the nervous system – helping to shift people from the fight/flight/freeze of the sympathetic nervous system response to parasympathetic ease.

How does a person actually calm down from somatic movement and dance?

First understand that the nervous system is a messaging system that is reliant on the “sensory-motor loop”. In this system, every sensory input is meant to result in a motor response. Dance taught in cooperative supportive ways (using Teaching Tactics outlined above) can help unlock the paradoxically frozen state of being hyper-aroused. Frozen hyperarousal occurs when a sensory signal is so overwhelming that a person freezes instead of even fighting or fleeing. Fighting and running also are types of hyper-arousal indicated by an increased respiratory and heart rate accompanied by increased adrenaline and cortisol levels. The regularized, rhythmic respiratory rate that comes from pleasurable dancing helps one to move (respond to feelings and sensation).

How can regulation of the nervous system happen through dance?

Expressive movement can help shift the stress of conflict or even of trauma by

helping a person “motor out.” To “motor out” is to move in response to a stimulus and it is an excellent way to get the stress out of the body. Dance experiences that acknowledge that a person or the group are currently under stress give permission to release that stress. An educator could simply say – “Let’s all dance any way you like or need to for the next two minutes.” Dance is further focused on the aim of de-stressing when it also works to balance the nervous system. Somatic dance can do this by taking time to include well-paced breath rhythms with the movement (calms the autonomic nervous system), doing what is joyful versus taxing to the group (calms the cortex), and/or moving to slower calmer rhythms at first (stimulates the cerebrospinal fluid that nourishes the brain), followed by uplifting movement and music (stimulates endorphins) . These activities are best taught with good socio-emotional strategies. In other words, to be most effective, somatic dance needs to be properly guided. This is best done in a non-hierarchical way, using the teaching strategies described above.

When dance is taught with somatic awareness it also teaches a student to feel more – increasing sensory awareness. As previously stated, somatic activities teach how to increase breathing capacity and awareness of breath. Practicing awareness while moving stimulates the kinesthetic sense. Kinesthetic awareness allows for increased consciousness of any type of physical movement – whether it is dancing or life activities. Self-awareness, and especially being conscious while moving – the heart of somatic education – is a key inroad to being able to notice when anger is increasing, or that deep feelings are arising from experiences of humiliation, embarrassment, or abuse. As people of any age learn to note the subtle physiological changes that occur during different emotional states they are more able to self-regulate – to “nip in the bud” angry behavior – “to take a deep breath

and calm down”.

AMAP – Anger Mountain Awareness Process:

A Somatic Tool for Transforming Stress

Anger Mountain is a mental picture that includes the moment just before emotions spike, the moment they do spike, the descent of these emotions, and the time it takes to regain equilibrium. When anger intensifies, the sympathetic aspect of the autonomic nervous system spikes creating a mountain of stress. Stress causes the host of physiological responses described above. The lesson that is gained from picturing Anger Mountain is to notice that there is the moment (the spot just before the mountain emerges) of calm when a decision can be made NOT TO ESCALATE the conflict – to avoid the mountain. Learning to calm oneself is a key to having resilient responses to conflict. Finding a quiet spot to cool down or rest, or by locating one’s quiet place inside, after being exposed to something that triggers anger, AND before responding (or exploding) shifts behavior from the fight or flight or freeze, allowing for action, ideally peaceful or at minimum respectful responses. For instance, once calmed down one can choose to make a clear statement about feeling angry about the situation or making a tempered yet assertive request to get one’s needs/wants met. This is in high contrast to yelling, fighting, avoiding, or getting depressed. Contemplative practice can both help in maintaining repose and in gaining “the big picture” in a noxious situation. Having skill in being mindful supports being able to make wise choices when anger-provoking situations occur.

Somatic Education is an embodied form of being present and aware. Somatic

movement classes help participants practice calming the nervous system and acting with calm. Somatic Dance can be like a movement meditation and in this way can be important for Conflict Resolution, as a positive contributing factor in anger management. It can also provide imaginary situations that allow for practice with dealing with anger triggers. Somatic dance activities could begin with calming and centering found in typical somatic movement classes but then build into action oriented movement phrases – providing a chance to express anger non-violent and to practice asserting one’s anger or feelings of injustice without becoming hostile or extremely defensive.

During dancing there is also often interaction with others. The dancing itself can be a positive force in communicating more peacefully with others. Practicing staying calm while interacting and negotiating shared space provides yet another opportunity to stay relaxed and to curtail and negative habitual responses. Being tuned in with one’s proprioceptive self (ability to feel bodily shifts and sensations of uneasiness) can once again help to notice if a situation is causing frustration or becoming a negative experience. If one senses the rise of anger or stress BEFORE the TIPPING POINT – the explosion of anger mountain - the stress and adrenaline will subside much more quickly.

In guiding this type of experience an effective and creative educator will support learning with somatic reflection questions such as:

How are you feeling now? Is there any extraneous tension you can release at this moment? Are you aware of your personal space? Are you aware of when you enter into someone else’s personal space? Is your posture awake and alive, ready to support your actions? Are you breathing fully? Are you able to assert yourself by moving with strength? Of course, these sentences can use vocabulary and concepts that are suitable for

different age children.

“Waking Up to Self” (removed for author identity) Curricular Component

A further extension of this Anger Mountain Awareness Process (AMAP) is named Waking Up To Self and has four steps:

1. Expressing feelings – movement done away from the source of the anger – the trigger.
2. Grounding one’s body – cooling down or resting or literally contacting the floor with feet, hands, back etc.
3. Determining the bigger issue or theme of an interpersonal conflict by asking “what of one’s integrity was being compromised?” This can be investigated further by asking guiding questions to dance out: How are you feeling? What do you feel the perpetrator/bully wants? Do you share any of the same values? What do you both care about? Are you connected to your own needs and desires? And, finally,
4. Communicating what you need: What other emotions are important for you to express now? Can you dance those feelings? Are there words that go with your experience? Can you dance as you speak those feelings? (Author 2010)

Dancing and Speaking

Dancing requires movement and breath; often involves vocalization and storytelling; and in some instances incorporates skilled and focused touch as a method for

instigating greater awareness. Contemporary dance is a melding of many dance styles and more often than not also includes exercises and concepts from somatic movement pioneers.

What other skills can dance educators bring to conflict resolution, violence prevention and healing from trauma and abuse besides gifts with the moving body? Most dance educators have either been trained or have figured out the importance of modulating one's voice to guide learning. Somatic movement educators and therapists recognize that vocalization is also a type of movement – it requires breath movement, vocal cord movement, tongue and mouth movement, as well as whole body positioning. The work of Irmgard Bartenieff, dancer, physical therapist, dance/movement therapist, designer of the original training for Laban Movement Analysts and founder of one of the most commonly used forms of somatic movement education in dance. Her somatic system – Bartenieff Fundamentals of Movement – has a series of exercises to explore how the body supports making resonant sounds through actively shaping the body and how this body shaping also impacts quality of voice, feelings and a sense of agency. Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, dancer, occupational therapist and founder of the somatic movement system – Body-Mind Centering® developed this work further in her Laban Movement Analysis certification program with Bartenieff and writes about it in her book *Sensing Feeling and Action* (1993). These body-vocalization-movement connections foster greater awareness of the voice and its tonality. This awareness is also helpful during conflicts and crises.

The continuum of movement (non-verbal communication) and language (verbal communication) as two intertwined forms of communication are critical to conflict resolution. Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) is a rich tool for expanding movement

repertoire. When LMA concepts are practiced physically this study can foster kinesthetic empathy with all people whether their movement style is similar or different for the viewer (Author 2002). As one is able to appreciate different movement styles one expands tolerance for that which is different. Practicing dances from different cultures, when joyful rather than forced, also expands this type of compassion and has been used as a form of conflict resolution internationally (Author, 2002).

Furthermore dance is a non-verbal language that helps us find deeper meanings of words and speech patterns. Words are fraught with symbolic content. Movement can reveal these meanings especially when time is taken to move and speak, and speak and move. This process is being used by the dance company “Company 12” that brings together veterans and dancers to depict the stories and emotions of war experiences (Baca 2013). Active Witnessing is another method devised by the author for meaning-making from dance expression. It has been a key tool in professional development in her workshops. Active Witnessing combines principles and actions from the technique called “Active Listening” typical to conflict resolution curricula with the “Witnessing” process of Authentic Movement – a dance structure that allows unconscious thoughts and feelings to emerge. It was one of the first methods that developed as a merger of her doctoral research, dance education methods, and her somatic expertise.

Active Witnessing

A full explanation of the method is not possible here but in short it can be explored by taking the following steps:

Have each person in the room think of a conflict that still has heart and meaning for him or her.

Pair up (there are many tools for that – see resource books from Educators for Social Responsibility/Engaging Schools). Have Person A tell Partner B about the conflict for a prescribed amount of time – 1-3 minutes is often enough. Then ask the person to continue to tell the story by moving but stop speaking out loud for another 60-90 seconds.

Partner B then echoes back the essence of the movement story for 15-30 seconds (this is a type of paraphrasing – selecting the salient features and stating them back).

For all transitions let the participants know when they have only 10 seconds left and that it is expected that they may have to stop mid-sentence or mid-movement.

Next Partner A discusses how it felt to speak, move and to be paraphrased through movement. Then Partner B shares some of aspects of her/his experience using I statements. Examples of I statements include: I felt surprised by ... I was delighted when... I felt sad at the moment you dropped to the floor. I had a question about why your arms went up, etc. Finally, there is a period of open dialogue – back and forth conversation with the partner and then with the whole group.

Somatic Dancing and Stress Reduction

Like the author's Active Witness Process described above, somatic explorations are generally improvisational. They can serve to foster comfort with surprises as well as help to see, feel and imagine options. There are other links to creativity. As stated before, somatic awareness increases bodily sensitivity by enhancing awareness of both sensation and of movement. Individuals become more self-aware and in theory, more self-regulating – more able to change directions in the course of escalating tensions, able to self-soothe, and get calm instead of lash out and hurt others verbally or non-verbally. (Author course

materials).

Somatic education is effective in eliciting new responses because it awakens awareness *and* helps to break old patterns – like impulsiveness and angry outbursts. Conflict induces stress. Recuperation normally brings humans back to homeostasis after the experience of a trigger has subsided. The initial response to stress is an array of behaviors from the fight, flight or freeze syndrome. With repeated stress (whether it involves, for examples, being publicly humiliated in dance class, or being physically bullied by a gang member outside of school) there is often no time to get back to normal. It is this constant anxiety that is “set” at a hyper level of homeostasis. By dancing however, the movement moves people out of a frozen or hyper-aroused state. The response to the stimuli is resolved through responding and the sensori-motor cycle is completed. Movement also shifts the hormonal aspects of stress of conflict or even of trauma, balancing the nervous system. Picture conflict as a form of overstimulation with limited time, place, safety, skill, or opportunity to respond/recover. Dance is a structured response to the stimulus and can also be a natural vehicle to somatic knowledge and its calming effects. This is distinct from taking a tranquilizer, which is more likely to numb out experience.

Review: How Somatic Education Attends to Stress Signals During Conflict

Somatic education is effective in eliciting new responses because it awakens awareness *and* helps to break old patterns – like impulsiveness and angry outbursts. Conflict induces stress. Somatic education provides relief from stress and teaches mindfulness while in action. Somatic activities and somatic dance provide an opportunity

to respond to the stimulus AND to begin to calm down, de-escalating the situation versus escalating it. Somatic dance experience can actually help to perceive a trigger before it happens or much sooner in the cycle.

The triggers of stress can arise from the self or come from someone or some situation outside. A chronic baseline of stress (inability to return to homeostasis) can lead to anxiety, panic or other mental imbalances. Therapists aware of the mind-body connection observe that with each mental stress there is often a physical counterpart. In working with abuse and trauma the psycho-physical impact of an overwhelming, under-supported situation is noted. Anywhere along the continuum of stress, conflict, abuse, to trauma, movement is a key to regulating the body and its physiology is including a more balanced homeostasis. Movement made conscious through somatic awareness expedites this process of regulation by bringing attention to both the habitual negative responses and the potential new behavioral choice. Dance, when infused with somatic awareness, can be deeply healing (Halprin 2000; LeBaron, Macleod, and Ackland 2013).

Dance provides many benefits that contribute to creative conflict management. Establishing easy-going breath patterns and other relaxed baselines is useful for relearning the correct way to do a plié or to heal from crises. We can engage with our breath throughout the day as a step toward “being ready” for the stress of a new task or a scary situation. Healthy homeostasis expedites developing new relationships with the floor, with one’s self, and others, who ideally are supportive. Somatic education aims to hold judgment and is infused with a calm compassion.

The art of learning new dance sequences from someone else’s movement repertoire helps in the acquisition of new behaviors as well as their related attitudes

(Bartenieff 1980). Improvisation and choreography also expand responsiveness by setting up contexts in which to apply these new “states of mind”. Practicing any movement with somatic consciousness includes allowing emotions to arise and with proper leadership to be safely expressed. When dance leaders are trained in somatic education they gain an array of creative tools for supporting holism in dance, and are ideally also educated in how to help provide psychophysical and emotional support when complex feelings arise (Author 1992).

Taking time to reflect on the movement is the first step in making what is unconscious conscious. By moving and dancing what is unconscious is allowed to “bubble up”. Finding words to express the movement and the feelings evoked can also help reveal the meaning of the movement and uncover creative solutions to conflict.

How can somatic awareness support a teacher’s responses during the moment that conflicts arise? Conflict is inevitable; educators can learn to model and guide productive interactions with conflict. Three examples are:

1. Help students rebalance by establishing a “safe container” free from dangerous “triggers”, the causes of abuse or trauma, create an “island of decency” in your classroom using the Teaching Tactics outlined above.
2. Supported by the use of the Teaching Tactics, guide self-regulation by integrating somatic skills within a movement or dance lesson. First locate stress patterns in the body; then practice how this awareness can help signal the need to calm down; then practice movement scenarios that shift a habitual, negative response to conflict to a new behavior (shifting from angry stomping to light and free jumping) – finding new more positive solutions.

3. Set-up up somatic experiences that foster awareness of internal experiences in relationship to differences that may cause discomfort, and then establish bridges – have students dance each other’s dances. This type of sharing has similar benefits when school families are brought together to eat each other’s favorite foods.

Research-Based Curricular Programming

Curricular approaches from this research have since been implemented by the author and ranges from working with bullying problems to teaching students skills to de-escalate or resolve conflicts, or infusing multi-cultural sensitivity into syllabi. Workplace #3’s professional development topics include providing dance educators with online and DVD access to resources for choreographic projects that include violence or tension but do so in socially-conscious ways in order to foster discussion and raise awareness, improving socio-emotional climate during recess periods inclusive of dance and diverse cooperative games, and teaching classroom and arts educators alike to use somatic awareness to help children to self-regulate in order to avoid put-downs, accidents and deliberate acts of aggression. Further applications have included graduate level teacher education through Cx University; teacher evaluation (the creation of an assessment tool that evaluates teachers ability to convey socio-emotional principles holistically), and programmatic review (assessing programs for goal consistency vis-a-vis lesson objectives and manner of delivery).

Summary of Author’s Somatic Dance Model for Conflict Resolution

While it was difficult to locate dance education programs focused on components of peace education in the 1990s, performance groups and programs focused on peace are now burgeoning: Move This World formerly Dances for Peace (throughout USA); European Graduate School's program in Conflict Resolution and the Arts (Switzerland); the Center for Kinesthetic Education's – Performing Peace, Including the Bully (New York City); Rena Kornbluth's Disarming the Playground (Wisconsin); Conference on Intercultural Conflict and the Arts (Lima Peru), and the conflict resolution programs at the University of Vancouver. It is a suggestion that more of these programs include a somatic component.

The dance and somatic processes described in this article are predominantly guided self-explorations that help move out intense or frozen (numbed) feelings. In a model developed as part of the Dynamic Embodiment Somatic Movement training called Waking Up to Self, this expression needs to be followed by grounding and centering the physical body. Then time is spent connect with deeper desires for action and learning skills to communicate the envisioned next steps. In other words, when a situation has involved being in a hyper-adrenalized state (somewhere on the continuum of trauma) a somatic component is essential before communication can be effective. Ideally these physical explorations of how to express emotions and then also to connect with the ground are followed by discussions or coaching to find out what the true need and desire is underneath the angry or upset feelings. This usually involves speaking, but this model also suggests that effective body language and movement support success in verbal communication. One way to do that is to explore feelings, values, positions as well as the

details of the conflict situation, and to do this through dance. By aligning verbal and non-verbal communication one is able to concretize feelings and desires and move forward out of the mire of a conflict. To support the ability to use these skills in the moment of conflict it is important to practice communicating these desires and needs in role-plays but also to apply the experiences in real settings.

One finding from the 1998 research is that dance technique, composition and choreography all have a role in teaching self-control, anger management, and peace education (Author 1998, 2010). Setting up activities that involve co-choreography – making dances or dance phrases together is a perfect setting for learning to negotiate and resolve conflict peacefully, especially if educators use the Teaching Tactics outlined in the first pages. A further goal when dealing with an immediate conflict is to infuse the communication with empathy and compassion if at all possible or appropriate. This can take time as it often involves working toward forgiveness, not often a quick process. Strategies to practice forgiveness are becoming more available (LeBaron, Macleod, and Ackland 2013; Luskin 2003). Bringing the smiles and laughter of dancing together into students' lives is a powerful way to shift an emotional climate of derision and hostility to joy and empathy. Using a somatic model, spending time attending to the messages that the body carries helps make these dance experiences more meaningful and is a road toward community building – the basis for violence prevention.

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