

Somatic Movement Education

A Body-Mind Approach to Movement Education for Adolescents

Part I

by Susan Bauer, M.A.

Somatic education is a term that has come to encompass several disciplines developed during the twentieth century in Europe and the United States. These disciplines, which have gone under various categorical names including bodywork, body therapies, and movement repatterning, represent a variety of therapeutic and educational approaches to working with the body. As a field, they share a common focus on the relationship between the body and the many aspects of the self (Murphy, 1992, p. 386). Pioneers in the field such as Lulu Sweigard, Mabel Todd, Moshe Feldenkrais, Ida Rolf, and Nikolais Alexander were instrumental in the dissemination and development of this work through their research, teaching, and writing. Each developed a specific method or approach to working with the body and movement.

As I began to teach at several private high schools, I recognized the hunger students had to understand and feel more "at home" in their bodies, and felt that such somatic approaches would be valuable—if not invaluable—for my students. My desire to develop, teach, and document a curriculum in somatic movement edu-

cation was further motivated by two factors. One was the underrepresentation of an experiential study of the body in both dance and physical education programs in our schools. The other, and perhaps most compelling, factor was my desire to offer my students this experiential study that had been so valuable to me. My ongoing studies in somatics inspire me as an artist and continue to influence my approach to teaching dance and movement. A personal understanding of one's body enhances and supports all forms of physical expression; underlying all of our movement experience is our moving body.

The following overview provides background information about the particular fields of somatics that I studied, and explains why I have drawn on each one as a resource in developing my curriculum in movement education. While these fields encompass many approaches, I particularly draw from *Experiential Anatomy*, *Mind-Body Centering®*, *Ideokinesis*, and the *Bartenieff Fundamentals*. Because my experiences in *Authentic Movement* and forms of improvisational dance have influenced both the philosophy and content of the curriculum, I dis-

cuss these forms as well.

Experiential anatomy, a term that refers to a mode of learning about one's body through movement, touch, imagery, and cognitive study, developed parallel to the field of bodywork. This method encourages experiential learning about body structure and function through active physical participation. One's experience with the exercises becomes the basis from which one draws conclusions, and determines what is learned and what is left to be learned. Experimenting, observing, analyzing, questioning, and redefining are an integral part of this study. Motivation, the desire to be involved and to participate with an openness to new experience, is a key element as well (Bainbridge Cohen, 1991, p. 13).

I was introduced to experiential anatomy through a course taught by Caryn McHose in the dance program at Middlebury College (see Olsen in collaboration with McHose, 1991). A major focus of the course was on participation in exercises described in Mabel Todd's *The Thinking Body: A Study of the Balancing Forces of Dynamic Man*, first published in 1937. The course also included study of the vari-

ous body systems using *The Anatomy Coloring Book*. This experiential learning helped me to formulate and physically integrate a more realistic understanding of my body that profoundly affected and deepened my dancing. In addition, I found that limitations I had experienced in dancing began to diminish as I spent time inside and outside of class working on related exercises and visualizations.

The value I found in this class motivated me to study and learn more about the related methods. Over the next ten years I studied various methods, including Laban Movement Analysis, Bartenieff Fundamentals, Ideokinesis, and Body-Mind Centering®.

Body-Mind Centering

Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen founded the School for Body-Mind Centering® in New York City in 1973. Bainbridge Cohen's innovative techniques integrate her vast experience in traditional and alternative approaches to movement and healing. In addition to studying dance, dance therapy, yoga, and voice, she is an occupational therapist and a neurodevelopmental movement therapist. She has also been certified as a Laban Movement Analyst and as a Kestenberg Movement Profiler. She has taught at many colleges and universities, conducts workshops around the world, and presently continues to teach at and direct the School for Body-Mind Centering.

Body-Mind Centering (BMCSM) is an approach to movement analysis and reeducation based on study of the interrelationship of the body systems and of the developmental movement patterns of infant movement in the first year of life. Exploration of each of the body systems is seen as a way to gain access to both a movement quality and a particular state of mind associated with that movement. For example, moving from the bones evokes clarity and directness, whereas moving from the organs evokes emotions and fullness. Study of BMC also includes cognitive and experiential learning about breathing and vocalization, the senses and the dynamics of perception, and the art of touch and repatterning. BMC practitioners are applying these principles in many disciplines such as dance, athletics, bodywork, physical, occupational, and speech therapies, psychotherapy, med-

icine, child development, education, and the arts, in both the U.S. and abroad (Bainbridge Cohen, 1993, p. 2).

I began my study of Body-Mind Centering with Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen in 1984. I draw on the perspectives of Body-Mind Centering in my classes because they encompass both cognitive and kinesthetic learning experiences that I have found helpful to develop one's fullest physical and expressive range. The BMC paradigm also provides a comprehensive body-based language for describing movement and exploring the body/mind relationship. Further, the creative and innovative pedagogical techniques used by BMC teachers—for example, using warm water-filled balloons to represent our bodies' organs—serve to bring anatomy alive for students. I make use of such activities, as well as BMC methods of touch and repatterning in various partner activities, throughout the curriculum.

Ideokinesis

The term "Ideokinesis" was developed by Dr. Lulu E. Sweigard in 1973 to describe the work and ideas presented in her book, *Human Movement Potential: Its Ideokinetic Facilitation*, which has been widely used by movement and dance educators. Sweigard, a student of Mabel Todd, developed her work from extensive scientific research and teaching experience at New York University, Columbia, and Julliard. Ideokinesis refers to a method of training the nervous system to produce new patterns through imagining movement and developing one's kinesthetic sense. The goal of this inner sensing or imagining is twofold: first, to recognize habitual patterns of movement already established in our bodies (some of which may be inefficient or unhealthy), and second, to begin to establish new, more efficient patterns (Dowd, 1990, p. 7).

Much of both Todd's and Sweigard's work was based on the idea of developing balance of both body and mind to maximize one's movement potential. Balance of the body, as understood in this work, is defined as aligning the axial weights and balancing muscle action around the joints. This minimizes the muscular energy needed to maintain the body in an upright position so that more

energy is available for movement (Dowd, p. 9). Rather than training one's body toward a particular dance style or athletic skill, the training of Ideokinesis helps people to become more efficient in their movement, thus maximizing their movement potential and minimizing their risk of injury or chronic strains (p. 8).

Balance of the mind involves quieting one's inner dialogue. While there is a variety of relaxation and meditation techniques to achieve this balanced mind, the process of visualization is especially effective in helping one to let go of previous thought patterns by providing an image on which to focus. Visualizations also initiate or inhibit certain neurological pathways to the various muscles. This patterning, which can begin in one's mind, is seen as a first step in the process of repatterning one's movement (Dowd, p. 7).

I studied Ideokinesis with Irene Dowd, a dancer and protégé of Dr. Lulu Sweigard at Wesleyan University. I draw on methods of Ideokinesis to help students recognize habitual patterns of movement and begin to make changes in their bodies. I also draw on the process of visualization to help students clear the mind of self-criticism and develop greater concentration.

Bartenieff Fundamentals

The term "Bartenieff Fundamentals" refers to both an approach to body movement education and a specific set of exercises that were developed by Irmgard Bartenieff, an influential student of Rudolf Laban. Beginning as a dancer in Germany, Bartenieff became a pioneer in the development of Laban Movement Analysis in the United States and in its application to dance therapy and physical therapy. She was a founding member and the first president of the Laban Institute of Movement Studies in New York City. She also held a degree in physical therapy and worked for many years in clinical settings with both children and adults. As a founding member of the American Dance Therapy Association, she also focused on the psycho-social aspects of movement. After her death in 1981, the Laban Institute's name was changed to the Laban/ Bartenieff Institute of Movement Studies.

Bartenieff developed a series of exercises she called "The Bartenieff Fundamentals," which were specifical-

ly designed to facilitate integration of bodily sensation with emotional expression as a means to unify body and mind (Levy, 1988, p. 142). These basic exercises, along with her approach to body education, are documented in her book, entitled *Body Movement: Coping with the Environment* (1980).

I include several of the Bartenieff Fundamentals in my curriculum. These exercises, which focus on movement initiation and spatial intent, are effective in engaging students in structured movement sequences as a method to help them repattern their movement.

Authentic Movement

The term "Authentic Movement" is one of two terms, along with "movement-in-depth," used by Mary Starks Whitehouse to describe a movement process she developed in the 1950s. A pioneer in the field now known as dance therapy, Whitehouse began as a dancer and laid the groundwork for a form that would later inspire many in the field of dance and dance therapy. Janet Adler, one such dance therapist, met and studied briefly with Whitehouse in the late 1960s. After Whitehouse's death, Adler formed the Mary Starks Whitehouse Institute in 1981 and began her own in-depth study of what she later called "the discipline of authentic movement" (Adler, 1987, p. 20).

The discipline of Authentic Movement, as developed by Adler, involves a mover and a witness. During a timed session, the mover closes his or her eyes and allows inner impulses from the body to guide his or her movement. The mover works with eyes closed in order to attend more deeply to the many levels of his or her kinaesthetic experience. The witness, generally seated to the side of the movement space, attends to both the mover and his or her own internal responses to the movement, bringing a specific quality of attention and presence to the experience of the mover. After the movement session, the two speak about the experience, providing a means to consciously process material that may have formerly remained at a more unconscious level (Adler, 1987).

The form of Authentic Movement is based on the belief that when we join in dialogue with our bodies, we will

know what we need: "The body is the guide, and the mover takes a ride on the movement impulses as they emerge" (Olsen, 1993, p. 47). In addition, the practice of Authentic Movement allows the mover to observe the thoughts in his or her mind much as one does in the beginning stages of many forms of meditation. Over time, the mover begins to internalize the presence of the witness, thereby developing a "supportive, non-judgmental but discerning inner witness" (Olsen, 1993, p. 49).

I studied Authentic Movement with several of the graduates of the Mary Starks Whitehouse Institute beginning in 1984, and more recently with Janet Adler. My ongoing practice of Authentic Movement informs my curriculum in several ways. A method of warming-up I call "Responsive Moving," for example, is derived from the form and philosophy of Authentic Movement.¹ This method, in which students start in stillness and follow their inner impulses to move, provides them with a gentle way of warming up without consciously structuring or judging their movement. In addition to expanding their movement vocabulary, this experience helps students develop a non-judgmental inner witness to support them while moving. Especially in adolescence, when self-consciousness can lead to a strong inner voice of doubt or self-criticism, students benefit from taking time to notice and "repattern" their inner voices, much as they begin to repattern their movement.

Contact Improvisation

There are various approaches to improvisation that focus on the process of dancing as a means of personal expression, self-development, and social interaction. One of these is Contact Improvisation, a duet form developed by Steve Paxton in 1972 in which dancers improvise their movement while engaging in a physical dialogue of touch, momentum, and shared body weight. During duets, dancers maintain a point of contact such that they are supporting and sharing each other's body weight.

Growing out of the 1960s counter-culture movement, the form was rooted in a belief in the movement potential of all people and rejected the view that to be a dancer one needed to undergo years of training in a

specific technique. The practice and performance of the dance began as more of a social form in which, theoretically, anyone could participate (Novack, p. 11). As the form evolved, teachers of Contact Improvisation incorporated various methods of bodywork into their teaching, offering beginning dancers an experience of the body and gravity that helped them orient to the dancing. The techniques of Contact Improvisation continue to evolve through experience and experiment. This form of dance influences the work of many noted contemporary choreographers and is taught in many college and university dance programs.²

From studying Contact Improvisation, I learned to integrate bodywork into the teaching of movement; Contact Improvisation manifests in movement many of the concepts of bodywork I had studied previously. I draw on elements of Contact Improvisation, along with other approaches to improvisation, to provide a balance of sensory and motor activity and to add an aspect of playfulness and spontaneous interaction to the class.

A Body/Mind Approach to Movement Education for Adolescents

Dance and movement educators have increasingly gained support for including movement in education. However, our educational system still perpetuates a view of mind and body as separate. The evolution of somatics is itself a testimony to the need for reintegration of body and mind to address this dichotomy that we have inherited in Western culture. As adult educators trained in somatics, how can we bring study of the body and practical, everyday tools for the integration of body and mind into the educational system in a way that is valuable and meaningful to students themselves? This article will discuss a curriculum in somatic movement education I have developed over ten years of working with adolescents in order to address this question.

Adolescents clearly struggle with a complex variety of choices. Daily lifestyle decisions regarding diet, sex, drugs, alcohol, sleep and interpersonal relationships all profoundly affect—and reflect—their values and their body-mind relationships. They also respond to and interact with a multi-

plicity of cultural perceptions and media images portrayed through magazines, television, videos, computers, and pop culture that affect their self-image and self-esteem. They are influenced by the culture from which they come, while their behavior and values also influence and create the culture in which they live. The escalating rate of violence in our nation's schools is further evidence of the pressing need to introduce skills with which students can navigate the complicated transitions that define adolescence.

In this curriculum, although students engage in similar activities, each of their responses is unique. What is meaningful to them is what they discover about their own movement patterns, their body/mind relationships, their lifestyles, their feelings, and their connections to themselves and others. Learning occurs as they become aware of their personal responses to changes in their internal and external environments. Furthermore, when students understand more about personal choices, their potential for growth is enhanced. By engaging in this curriculum, students can gain some of the valuable tools necessary to assume responsibility for the quality of their lives now and into adulthood.

As noted by dance educator Peggy Schwartz (1991), "Curriculum design can be seen as a mirror of the culture in which it is embedded, reflecting the culture's values and beliefs. It can also be understood as a means of shaping values and beliefs" (p. 68). Especially during adolescence, when habits are formed that are often carried into adult life, students can benefit from the experiential learning of somatics—giving them an opportunity to learn about their body/mind at a time when this is central to their development. As educators, we can offer students experiences that help them feel more at home with themselves and increase their self-understanding. This benefits the students themselves and society as a whole.

The way we relate to others and our environment is a reflection of this primary relationship to ourselves. By nourishing students' primary relationships to themselves, we cultivate their broader relationships with others and their environments. In this article, I introduce my theoretical basis for creating such a curriculum in somatic movement education and discuss how these theories are reflected in specific

units in the curriculum that I call "Explorations."

Theoretical Basis of the Curriculum

Forever focused on their bodies, adolescents struggle with their perception of themselves. They think about their appearance, weight, physical skill in sports and athletics, and especially, about how they are perceived by others. Yet, with all this focus on their bodies, in the present educational system students are barely learning about their bodies, nor are they given an opportunity to focus directly on their own perceptions and subjective experience of their bodies. As adolescents bloom into their sexuality, the body is a volatile subject avoided by parents and teachers alike. Despite this taboo, there is a need to help students learn about their bodies and develop healthy body-images and self-perceptions. Clearly, adolescents need support and guidance in developing healthy relationships with themselves.

What in their education currently addresses this obvious need? Although programs in dance and movement education exist in curricula for young children, movement curricula for adolescents consist mainly of physical education programs in sports, athletics, and only occasionally, in dance. Approaches are generally skill-oriented, such that one skill leads to another skill, which leads to a further skill. What is assessed as developmental progression through the curriculum is the degree of skill being developed—a measure of physical prowess, but not necessarily a full measure of health and well-being. In fact, while some students do succeed in a skill-based approach to sports, athletics, and dance, many others who do not often develop negative body images and negative relationships to movement. We see evidence of this today as we work with adults, a generally self-conscious population of movers.

How has this evolved? In our culture at large, the body is generally studied or explored as an object apart from the experience of the self. In fact, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen notes with astonishment the omission of our kinesthetic senses from the traditionally named 'five senses': "It is fascinating and, I must confess frustrating to me that sensations of movement and visceral activities have been excluded from the grouping of the five senses.

As all sciences are reflections of the socio-politico-religious ideas of their time, it is appropriate that the historical repression of bodily sensation in Western culture has been transmitted as a matter of scientific fact" (Bainbridge Cohen, 1993, p. 114).

Even in subjects that seem to be directly related to the body, such as dance, physical education, and biology, traditional teaching approaches usually omit attention to sensation and subjective experience. In human biology, for instance, the body is generally explored through readings, pictures, and plastic models. Rarely do students refer to, touch, or move their own bodies in studying the human structure or the mechanics of movement. In physical education and many approaches to dance the body is similarly objectified, i.e., often defined as a tool to be refined and controlled for the achievement of specific physical goals. Even Howard Gardner, who succeeded in bringing the term "bodily-kinesthetic intelligence" into the national discussion of educational reform (Schwartz, 1993, p. 9), defines kinesthetic intelligence in terms of physical skill or manual dexterity (Gardner, 1985, p. 206).

As noted by pioneer dance therapist Mary Whitehouse, however, there is a difference between moving for the purpose of developing specific movement skills and moving for the experience of moving: "The kinesthetic sense can be awakened and developed in using any and all kinds of movement, but I believe it becomes conscious only when the inner, that is the subjective connection is found, the sensation of what it feels like to the individual" (1958, p. 7).

Whitehouse also states, "Physical activities are helpful . . . at least they help us to move . . . But they don't connect us with ourselves, because they still have a motive external to the experience of ourselves. They still put us in the position of moving our bodies for a purpose, instead of [for the purpose of] becoming aware of ourselves" (*Creative Expression*).

As the body is objectified in their education, students develop a detachment from their own bodies. Subjective experience and objective fact, however, are inseparable. Deane Juhan (1987) discusses this interrelationship by stating, "Subjective and objective are not two distinct ways I have of viewing reality; they are two

sides of a continuous feedback loop which together make up that reality. How completely I sense my body and how I feel about it has everything to do with the particular course of events going on within it. Attitudes, postures, patterns of behavior, and physiological functions are inextricably fused together in our organisms, and it is primarily my conscious awareness of their interrelationships which gives me some measure of control over my well-being . . . *the only facts about myself that are altogether real to me are those that have come through my own attentiveness* [emphasis added]" (pp. 338-339).

Especially in the often self-conscious stages of adolescence, an approach that addresses this dynamic between objective and subjective reality is essential. However, few educators are currently developing approaches to somatics explicitly for the adolescent population. While educators in the field of dance/movement education continue to develop innovative approaches to movement for young children and while experiential anatomy and other somatic-based approaches are beginning to be offered for college-level adults, adolescents are a highly neglected population in current curricular development.

Paradoxically, despite the resistance to sensation and movement in American culture and education, the field of somatics continues to be an ever-expanding arena influencing many professions, such as the sciences, medicine, the arts, and clinical therapies such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, and psychology.

To begin to bridge this gap and utilize the wealth of material being developed in the field of somatics, I have developed an approach to movement education to address the particular needs of adolescents. My approach is based on experiential anatomy, rather than on creative dance or sports, as in most curricular models of movement education for young children in elementary school. Material from this curriculum has also been taught in a wide variety of school, university, and community settings and can be adapted to many age groups.

This curriculum consists of what I call "Explorations," which are a combination of movement, partner work, drawing, and discussions. Through these Explorations, each student becomes his or her own lab to move, experience, and learn from. Keeping

students at the core of the learning experience, with their own interests, discoveries, and insights guiding the curriculum, is essential to this process. Especially in adolescence, when one's body can become a battleground for independence as schools, families, and peers dictate how one should look and behave, students benefit from experiencing the teacher as an ally and a guide. Putting experiential anatomy into contexts to which they can relate, such as methods of warm-up, injury prevention, and the development of focus and concentration, further engages students in the curriculum and helps them find immediate, practical applications for their discoveries. Students also need time to process and integrate body/mind changes they may experience through each Exploration. For this reason, each Exploration concludes with discussion questions and/or an integrative movement activity.

Although there are many mysteries in the workings of the body, there is much that can be known, felt, and understood. For example, when I facilitate study of the skeletal system, students first visualize and then draw their skeletons, trace their own bones, work with partners to feel and identify the curves of the spine, and explore the variations in movement and mood that evolve from shifting their initiation of movement from the bones to the joints to the synovial fluid in the joints.

Explorations also provide opportunities to explore the dynamic interrelationship of body and mind. For example, when students study the physiology of breathing, they touch their own rib cages, learn to differentiate movement of the lungs, ribs, and diaphragm, and play an active role in maintaining their health through an awareness of their breathing. Deep, full breathing is essential to life; it creates a sense of ease that helps to restore both our physical and emotional health. We can learn to use our breathing to increase our physical vitality and clear and focus our mind. Especially in the often self-critical stage of adolescence, such approaches help students to clear their inner dialogue and be more fully present. Awareness of our breathing also teaches us to slow down and learn not to put our bodies "on hold" while we push ahead through our lives.

Explorations also facilitate con-

scious awareness of our cultural conditionings that, literally and figuratively, affect and shape our bodies. For example, media-projected body ideals, parental influences, and peer expectations all influence adolescents' experience and perceptions. The cultural ideal of the flat stomach, for instance, has perpetuated a perception of the abdomen as solely a girdle of muscle, rather than also as a container for our vital organs. However, when we allow our organs to respond to the dynamic flow created by our breath, our breathing becomes fuller. Facilitating student discussion about such complex topics encourages a deeper understanding of their own experiences. By becoming aware of ways in which cultural perceptions influence their bodies, they gain more choice in how to respond. In *Sharing the Dance*, dancer and dance anthropologist Cynthia (Novack) Cohen Bull addresses this complex interrelationship among culture, perception, and active choice: "The body and movement are not purely natural phenomena but are constructed, in concept and practice. . . . Culture is embodied. . . . A primary means of understanding, knowing, making sense of the world comes through the movement experiences society offers to us. Movement constitutes an ever-present reality in which we constantly participate. We perform movement, invent it, interpret it, and reinterpret it, on conscious and unconscious levels. In these actions, we participate in and reinforce culture, and we also create it. To the degree that we can grasp the nature of our experience of movement, both the movement itself and the contexts in which it occurs, we learn more about who we are and about the possibilities for knowingly shaping our lives" (Novack, 1990, p. 8). Likewise, the curriculum we offer students both reflects and can create the culture from which they come.

Finally, adding curriculum in experiential anatomy to the existing programs offered for adolescents serves to balance the current focus on motor learning with a more sensory-based experience. Guiding students in the repatterning of their movement also provides them with a foundation from which to participate more successfully in programs focused on skill development. Further, this curriculum allows students to gain insight about themselves and their body/minds at a time

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Feral mother cat on cover, and kitten photos on inside pages by Clyde, a California photographer.

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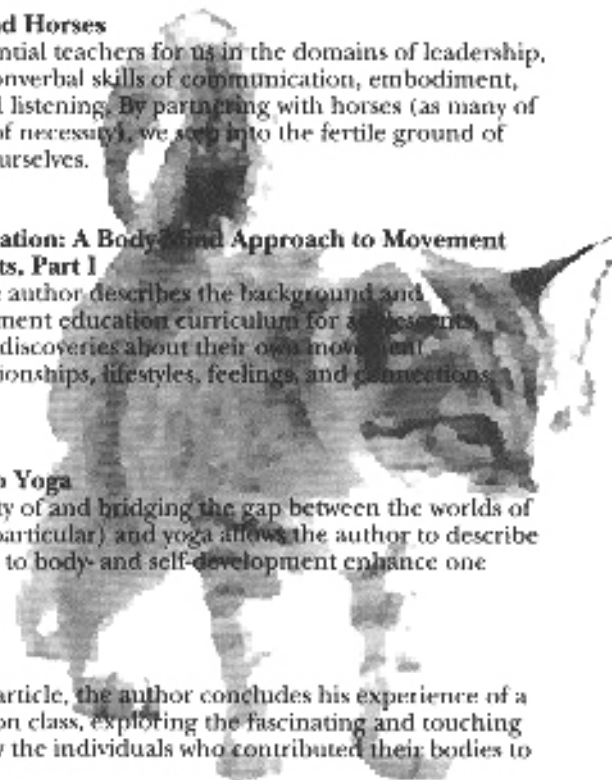
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when this is particularly relevant to their development. As they gain a more comprehensive understanding of their own bodies, students also learn both to respect individual differences and to recognize their commonalities as human beings. Such profound yet simple realizations can add to a growing sense of respect and compassion for themselves and others. In addition to supporting the achievements of dancers and athletes, somatic movement education can positively influence the health and well-being of our developing children, and, thereby, of our next generation of adults.

Implications

This curriculum is based on over fifteen years of study of several somatic approaches and ten years of working with adolescents, yet it is still only a beginning. To expand the potential of this field, we need creative body-based approaches to curriculum that are sensitive and responsive to the needs of children and developing adolescents. Somatic movement education can then become a significant component in students' education through its inclusion in domains such as dance, physical education, health and wellness, and the sciences. To do this, we also need qualified teachers. Presently, many professionals have undergone extensive in-depth training in various somatic approaches. Such professionals can be engaged to help expand present curricula through collaborations with educators. In addition, athletic trainers, childhood education specialists, dance teachers, physical education teachers, science teachers, and health and wellness educators should all increase their skill in and knowledge of somatics to create more body-based curricula. Further, and perhaps most importantly, somatics should be included in the training and degree programs for educators in these fields. Through such initiatives, a larger population of children and adults can increasingly benefit from the growing field of somatics. ❧

Notes

1. The philosophies of Authentic Movement were also influenced by Mary Starks Whitehouse's study of the Jungian concepts of the unconscious and the collective unconscious. Although Authentic Movement is

often seen as a way to gain access to these aspects of ourselves, for the purposes of this curriculum, I do not facilitate it in this way.

2. For further information about Contact Improvisation, see the dance journal *Contact Quarterly: A Vehicle For Moving Ideas*, edited by Nancy Stark Smith and Lisa Nelson, P.O. Box 603, Northampton, M.A., 01060.

Copies of *A Body/mind Approach to Movement Education for Adolescents Curriculum* are available from the author.

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