

Winter Term 2009—Somatic Movement Education

This project provided the opportunity for me to develop a basic understanding of human musculoskeletal anatomy, reflect on dance education, and explore several different somatic healing techniques. The three major components of the project were independent reading, a collaborative dance rehearsal and performance, and a class in energetic spinal balancing.

During the week of December 21st I read *Awakening the Spine* by Vanda Scaravelli and *Somatics* by Thomas Hanna, using *Anatomy of Movement* by Blandine Calais-Germain as an anatomical reference. I practiced many of the exercises in *Somatics*, finding that the recurring lower back pain that I have experienced over the last few years became a valuable teacher and case study. I was particularly interested in the concept of “sensory-motor amnesia” and learning to think of all pain as a functional rather than structural problem. Both Scaravelli and Hanna emphasized the importance of treating people with pain or illness as subjects actively engaged in the healing process that rather than passive objects to be healed by professional physicians.

In the week between Christmas and New Year’s, I worked on rehearsing for an alumni dance performance at my high school. A young woman alum who is currently dancing professionally with a company leads this collaborative process and teaches a class to the alumni dancers. She was joined by another member of her dance company from China. In my journal, I reflected on their teaching processes and the improvisational exercises they used to generate the material for the concert we performed after a week. I have always valued dance’s potential as a healing art and was interested in exploring how movement education can foster a type of embodied awareness that supports holistic mind-body health.

During the week of January 4th, I continued my reading and met with Janice Durand, the polarity therapist and family friend who taught the energetic spinal balancing class. She introduced me to the basic principles of polarity therapy and we went over some of the anatomy of the spine. On January 9th and 10th I attended the two-day intensive from 9 AM to 5:30 PM. I worked with a group of therapy professionals from diverse backgrounds in massage, polarity, acupuncture, and hypnosis. I was able to both

give and receive polarity sessions, and learned a huge amount about the spine, pelvis, cranium, skeletal and nervous systems. We practiced the Lovett Brother's technique of paired spinal balancing and I learned how to locate key landmark vertebrae. We also practiced some polarity yoga exercises that helped with my back pain.

The following week I went to physical therapist who practices Feldenkrais as well as traditional physical therapy. He helped me come to a better understanding of what is causing pain in my hips and lower back, and I was impressed to observe his process of guiding his patient into their own internal realization of musculoskeletal functions. I also finished up reading the extensive packet of information on polarity therapy that Janice had given me, and read selections of *Wisdom of the Body Moving* by Linda Hartely, which had been recommended to me during the dance rehearsal process.

Throughout the entire experience I kept a journal as a way to jot down key principles and to reflect on and integrate experiences. This will be a valuable resource in the coming years as I continue to pursue bodywork and somatic movement education. This experience helped me to develop as a dancer, healer, and intellectual interested in the body. I feel much more aware of different techniques and modalities that I might be interested in further exploring. I truly value the flexibility that winter term provides for students to independently pursue their interests with both breadth and depth.