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## **BALLET AS SOMATIC PRACTICE: A CASE STUDY EXPLORING THE INTEGRATION OF SOMATIC PRACTICES IN BALLET PEDAGOGY**

### **ABSTRACT**

This case study explores one teacher's integration of Alexander Technique and the renowned work of neuromuscular retrainer Irene Dowd in ballet pedagogy to establish a somatic approach to the teaching, learning and performing ballet technique. This case study highlights the teacher's unique teaching method called IMAGE TECH for dancers (ITD) and offers evidence to support ITD as a somatic approach to ballet pedagogy. The personal perspectives of the teacher and students in this ethnographic study support my observations that ITD integrates principles of somatic practices. Additionally, these data illustrate the pedagogical innovation involved in the teacher's communication with her ballet students, which subsequently moves away from traditional authoritarian teaching practices. With ITD concepts communicated in such a way that the students feel confident to individually adapt the material, internal authority becomes established and ballet students can claim autonomy in their training and future careers.

### **INTRODUCTION: TRADITION VS INNOVATION**

Ballet pedagogy and somatic practices are no longer at opposite ends of the dance education spectrum. Increasingly, ballet teachers are realizing the potential health benefits of somatic practices used in ballet class (Jackson 2005; Kirk 2014, Krasnow and Wilmerding 2015). According to research, somatic approaches applied by dancers help to develop healthier and deeper relationships to their practices, increase body awareness, enhance body image, as well as establish safe alignment (Kirk 2014; Krasnow and Wilmerding 2015). This case study was conducted as part of my doctoral dissertation, which ultimately yielded this unexpected opportunity to observe the integration of two well-established somatic practices into ballet pedagogy at a post-secondary institution offering a BFA degree. The purpose of the dissertation was to explore how an embodied student-teacher relationship manifested itself in the studio environment, emphasizing non-verbal student-teacher communication in advanced level ballet classes. The ballet classes chosen for the study were expected to be traditional in their structure and pedagogy. However, when the teacher discussed in this case study began her class with an exercise, during which the dancers tapped the top of their heads or their ears, I knew that the scope of the research had changed. These ballet students had an untraditional internal focus facilitated by verbal instruction and self-correction stemming from somatic practices.

The purpose of this article is to explore the integration of somatic practices in ballet pedagogy as observed in a case study conducted in the 2014/2015 academic school year, highlighting the teacher's unique teaching method called IMAGE TECH for dancers (ITD). The guiding questions for this report include: What is ITD and why was it developed? What are the teacher's strategies for communication of ITD? What are the

perceived benefits and perceived difficulties for students when applying ITD to all of their dance technique classes? The lived experience of the students and teachers were investigated using ethnographic fieldwork strategies. The research was conducted through direct observation using pre-prepared class observation charts and field notes. Multiple interviews were conducted with the teacher and the students completed extensive email interviews. Pseudonyms are used throughout the article as the identities of the participants were protected by ethics protocol.

The transformation in ballet from traditional education to more student-centered learning is slow to occur, but many educators are now implementing strategies to affect the changes needed. The teacher in this study combined imagery and somatic practices including both Alexander Technique and the work of Irene Dowd to create ITD. This somatic approach was based on injury prevention, while facilitating the mastery of advanced ballet technique. This method shifted the power dynamic between teacher and student and fostered the students' inner authority. In a related study, ballet teacher Gretchen Alterowitz recognizes the mind/body problem inherent in traditional pedagogy. In the report of her 2014 study, Alterowitz aims to demonstrate the benefits of teaching in a non-authoritarian way, altering the power dynamics in the classroom, resulting in an alternative student-teacher relationship. Alterowitz explains that although pedagogy and the student-teacher relationship "shapes ballet itself" the institution of ballet remains relatively static (9). She emphasizes the necessity of altering the traditional communication between students and teachers and she stresses the importance of how the subject is taught taking precedent over what is being taught.

Similarly, Anne Burnidge (2014) seeks to illuminate threads between feminist/democratic pedagogy and somatic pedagogies. She uses the terms democratic and feminist interchangeably, which signifies her philosophical viewpoint, which "honors diversity of thought, knowledge, culture and personal identity" (38). Burnidge asserts that using somatic practices in ballet will change the focus for the dancers from the third person external perspective to the internal first person viewpoint, allowing technical development to come from within. Inspired by dance professor Sylvie Fortin's (1998) case studies with modern dance teachers incorporating somatic practice, Burnidge explores her own use of somatics in the ballet studio, discovering both staunch resistance and complete engagement from various students.

Traditionally, the student-teacher relationship is saturated with a patriarchal history, hierarchical constraints, external aesthetic expectations, as well as pressure to meet and exceed the codified technique. However, critical analysis by scholars regarding institutionalization, the body, and pedagogy is shifting the foundations of traditional ballet for future generations. Similarly, innovations in the studio such as ITD have the potential to enhance ballet training. The roots of ITD date back to 1998 when the teacher began teaching at an elite post-secondary contemporary dance institution. Prior to joining the faculty of the school in this case study, the teacher stopped dancing professionally due to chronic injury. The teacher explained that upon arriving at the school she was badly injured, which prompted her to take Alexander Technique sessions from a colleague. After a few years of Alexander Technique, the teacher began working with Irene Dowd. In her current neuromuscular retraining techniques, Dowd continues the work of somatic practitioner Lulu Sweigard with her further development and adaptation of Ideokinesis. Ideokinesis is an imagery system that Sweigard used as a treatment

method to alter postural alignment patterns in dancers in her extensive study from 1929-1931 (Krasnow and Wilmerding 2015, 274). Donna Krasnow and Virginia Wilmerding state that Dowd “presents suggestions for practical sessions using imagery designed to improve neuromuscular coordination for a variety of anatomical areas” (2015, 274). Dowd’s work teaching “functional anatomy” and her focus on “improving mind/body instructions” is noted as a basis for the creation of sound dance images by teachers in dance education (Hanrahan 1995, 33).

The teacher began to isolate concepts and methodically decided on the words/phrases to use to communicate those concepts (Table 2). She created a training method termed IMAGE TECH for dancers (ITD). ITD put Alexander Technique and Irene Dowd’s material together while weight bearing. The teacher explained how she wanted the students to connect somatic practices with ballet technique, despite their initial feeling that ballet technique and somatic practices have opposing physical requirements (personal communication, October 10, 2014). She stated:

...what really was the biggest impetus, especially with Alexander, [was] that the dancers could *not* do that in a ballet class, because for them, one [Alexander] was a ‘don’t do’, like literally to let go and allow the head to float up and all the imagination but no muscle [use]. And the other [ballet], you’re supposed to lift up and *tendu*, and lift your leg, and support your core, and so on. The freshmen, they just couldn’t make the connection between Irene on the floor, Alexander sitting, lying down or even standing; but a ‘non-do’ thing, and then a ballet class. (personal communication, October 10, 2014)

To help the students make the connection that the teacher discusses in the above statement, she relied on verbal communication to prompt physical sensation. In this article, I use the term kinesthetic advice to refer to directions, instructions or suggestions made by the teacher that refer to how a movement should feel. Kinesthetic advice produces the desired aesthetic result through somatic sensation, as well as facilitating an internal focus for the dancers, which increases their proprioception of the movement. For example, if a student is asked to repeat a movement while attempting to feel that they are sinking into the ground, this instruction affects not only how they proprioceive their movement, that is to say experience their kinesthesia, but has likely changed the aesthetic quality of their movement. Kinesthetic advice is born of a teacher’s personal lived experiences as a dancer. Kinesthetic advice attempts to affect the movement from the dancer’s internal perspective to achieve the desired external aesthetic and may employ various types of images.

## METHOD

The lived experience of the students and teachers in this case study were investigated using ethnographic fieldwork strategies. As Anna Aalten (2007, 109) asserts, “the use of ethnographic perspective ensures an attentiveness to the dancer’s agency, informing and enriching the analysis.” The ethnographic fieldwork methods used to investigate the student-teacher relationship included participant observation using pre-prepared class observation charts and field notes, audio-recorded teacher interviews, as well as student email interviews. The choice of ethnographic fieldwork practices allowed the voices of the participants to be central to the research, as the description of the

embodied student-teacher relationship was contextualized by the participants' experiences of the transmission of embodied knowledge.

### **Participants**

The teacher was an American-born female who was trained in the United States where she danced professionally before embarking on a fifteen-year career as a ballet soloist in France. The students were in either first or second year of post-secondary education. In total, 42 dancers signed consent forms and were observed at various times throughout the research period. The option of completing interviews was given to 18 women (who were 18 to 20 years of age) dancing *en pointe* twice per week (*Pointe 2* class). There were approximately 18 dancers in the *Pointe 2* class at each observation. The teacher taught a Ballet 1 class twice per week, which consisted of 12 males and 12 females (who were 18 to 20 years of age) dancing in soft ballet slippers. This class was observed in order to spend more time recording the student-teacher communication.

### **Procedures**

In August 2014, a pilot study was conducted at a local commercial dance studio. The purpose of the pilot study was to test the original class observation chart, with the goal of efficiently recording verbal and non-verbal student-teacher communication. The chart was designed to contain notes in prescribed categories to indicate the types of communication the teacher favored in each exercise. Along the left side of the chart was a space for the name of the exercise being taught. Along the top of the chart were categories of demonstration and correction in traditional ballet class. The categories were derived from the dominant strategies used in ballet pedagogy.

Data collection began with class observation, followed by teacher interviews and communication with the students. A total of four classes were observed per session, at three different times during their eight-month school year, for a total of 18 hours of teacher observation. The original research plan was to record written field notes 50% of the time and use the observation charts the remaining 50%. Results showed that 53% of the classes were recorded using charts. Participant interviews followed class observations in each of the three sessions throughout the year. The teacher was interviewed three times for approximately 30 minutes per session. Four student participants completed the voluntary email interview email interview.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of the charts/field notes and various transcripts included indexing/coding. Following Anne Lacey and Donna Luff (2009), a thematic framework for categorization of data (coding) used both *a priori* themes as well as themes that emerged from the data. D. Soyini Madison (2012, 43, 45) supports the inclusion of both *a priori* themes for categorization as well as emergent themes as she describes "coding or logging" data in ethnography as grouping information under "themes and categories that you have accumulated in the field." Considering these criteria the thematic categories based on dominant pedagogical strategies, as well as themes emerging from fieldwork were used in the reporting of results.

All digital data were printed to hard copy and organized for preliminary analysis. The data were first divided into visits and then split into collection methods including

observation charts/field notes, teacher interview transcripts, and student email interview transcripts. The charts and field notes were presented in chronological order and follow the traditional ballet class structure. The familiarization stage in the interview analysis was the transcription of all audio-recordings (verbatim), as well as the reading of the email interviews. After the hard copies were printed and organized, the teacher interviews and student email transcripts were categorized in digital files. The student personal communication, transcripts were organized by date and pseudonym. All interview analysis included going through the digital data and cutting and pasting “significant statements, sentences or quotes that [provided] an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon” (Creswell 2007, 61). These statements were organized based on the initial coding.

### **Tables**

Mapping and interpretation of the multiple sources of data were facilitated through the creation of tables. Tables 1 and 2 include descriptive data pertaining to various general themes communicated by the teacher (Table 1) and images, kinesthetic advice, encouragement and verbal cues for concepts (Table 2). Table 1 was created to list general themes communicated by the teacher, which is a category that emerged from the data, as it was apparent from multiple modes of data collection that the teachers had a chosen focus for the class. These themes were repeated, demonstrated and practiced throughout the research period. My field notes, as well as teacher interviews documented the communication of the general themes listed in Table 1. Similarly, Table 2 was created in response to the patterns in the data that revealed the teachers’ kinesthetic advice and encouragement. These themes were the result of initial coding then digital clustering of teacher comments and student-teacher communication as listed on the observation charts/field notes. The categories of general themes, kinesthetic advice and encouragement emerged from the grouping of similar phrases and instances of teacher communication.

## **RESULTS: THE DEVELOPMENT OF IMAGE TECH**

This section discusses the first guiding question (listed above) regarding why the teacher developed ITD. The teacher explained that as a dancer she had a lot of injuries and was always “working through some sort of problem with my spine” or that she was “spraining [her] ankles all the time” (October 10, 2014). However, she recalls that in France there was no physiotherapy available for dancers. She stated, “so everything I was doing was by myself, trying to figure out how to manage with little bits of information here and there, from this or that person, and trying to figure out what I needed to do for my body in order to get it on stage at night” (personal communication, October 10, 2014). The teacher stated that she did not have good training as a dancer. She trained in New York City with well-known teachers. However, she said, “...you know that’s not going to give you anatomical information. It was square, good, straight on training if you knew what you were doing. You just go in there and do it; so you could just do it and it’s a very nice class and that’s what I had as training” (personal communication, October 10, 2014). The teacher recalls how she felt when she first began teaching. She explained:

I wouldn't let anybody tuck under that was my huge thing because of all the back injuries that I had. So I had a lot of things about the back that I knew from myself, but no anatomical thing [information] to back that up, other than I knew you needed a curve in your spine and that you could not take that away, and that I had done that for years and had twisted my vertebrae around in the other direction, and thus sprained my ankles all the time. (personal communication, October 10, 2014)

In addition to her awareness of the injuries that could be sustained from not working in a safe way, the teacher was conscious of how her training had psychologically affected her. She stated:

... I was most concerned about when I first starting dancing, and still am actually, is the vocabulary and the words that people use. I decided when I started teaching that I would throw out all of those negative words that I had been trained with, ever single one of them and replace them with something else. (personal communication, October 10, 2014)

She recalled the transition from dancing to teaching clearly. She stated that in her position as ballet mistress for Ballet Hispanico that she went through the process of finding the correct words to positively communicate feedback. She explained that she had to “figure out how [she] was going to give feedback and corrections. That was a very conscious thing” (personal communication, October 10, 2014).

### **IMAGE TECH: Recognizing Individuality**

Although ITD was becoming an established vocabulary within her teaching practice, while discussing areas of her pedagogy that continue to evolve, the teacher explained, “I change all the time and I learn every day, I try to find new ways to explain things, not everyone understands the same way, whether it is imagery, exercises, words...” (personal communication, November 19, 2014) The teacher described how her strategies were deliberate. She stated, “I am doing this on purpose, it's not just random, it's a very conscious thing to address every single person and their individual situation.” Her goal was to teach the students to self-correct and the process was different for every student. She stated:

I want them [Ballet 1 students] to be autonomous with their bodies, I want them to be able to self-correct by the end of a year with me and I only have them twice a week. ...so I want them to be autonomous, I don't want them to need me to do it. I want them to have felt it in their bodies and be able to say “AH!” and use all the tools. So really autonomy is the goal. (personal communication, October 10, 2014)

It was the teacher's awareness of individual learning, as well as her philosophy that ballet technique can and should be adapted to the body performing it, that led to her development of ITD.

It is her acceptance of the individual physical capabilities of the students that she claimed prompted students who were placed in higher levels of ballet to request individual sessions with her regarding specific issues. For example, one male student was

placed in a higher level of ballet, but requested coaching for *cou-de-pied* (personal communication, February 18, 2015). In discussing the intersection of gender and the practice of ITD, the teacher explained that many of the male dancers were interested in private coaching and that the student interest was not gender specific. She suggested that the reason the *Pointe 2* class (all females dancers) seemed to grasp the work more effectively than the Ballet 1 (half male, half female dancers) was the length of time that they had been practicing ITD and the frequency per week, as some of the dancers had taken her class four days per week last year and some were taking it four days per week this year.

## STUDENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION

This section addresses the second guiding question regarding the teacher's strategies for communication. Observations of the student-teacher relationship addressing the question of the teacher's strategies for communicating ITD are reported beginning with a brief discussion of the general themes of the classes (Table 1). Followed by the categories of tactile (hands on) cues, teaching strategies and language, which emerged after I began compiling and summarizing the data.

The teacher's focus throughout the observation period was preparing the students for a career in dance that would afford them longevity and allow them to experience limited injuries. She emphasized her belief that training at the school should foster the autonomy of the students. The teacher's obvious strength was her individual correction of the students. Every observed class contained teaching moments before, during (between *barre* and centre practice), or after the class in which a student would approach the teacher to ask for personal attention. She always gave them a few quiet and patient moments of personal feedback, which required internalized focus as she facilitated their understanding of a concept.

The themes of both the Ballet 1 and *Pointe 2* classes were the same, but were approached in different ways (Table 1). The teacher indicated that newer students did not yet have the capacity to understand her direction or apply the concepts based on the deeper level of embodiment that was developed during the second year of working in a somatic way. The teacher explained that generally in a year-long course, she began with the theme of a *cou-de-pied* and *retiré* class, followed by a *ronds de jambe* class and then an *attitude* class (personal communication, November 19, 2014). The teacher used the terms *coupé* and *passé* to indicate the use of *cou-de-pied* and *retiré*. The teacher explained why she began with concepts surrounding the placement of the pelvis. She stated:

I start with the pelvis because it is so easy to tuck, once they have an understanding of neutral spine, neutral pelvis then I add the turn out muscles...until the pelvis is established and the joints are in their house, I do not mention muscles. I want them to leave with a suitcase and be autonomous... (personal communication, November 19, 2014)

The teacher explained that autonomy was born of the students' ability to translate the concept to other classes. She explained, "For example when they went to the Balanchine

teacher and he is telling them, ‘down’, they will be able to see that it is [down] with their legs not tucking [the pelvis/tailbone] under” (personal communication, November 19, 2014). Additionally, she was explicit about the students not being in “limbo” while dancing, which gave them confidence in their approach. Limbo was a term that the teacher used to describe the “in between state” that a dancer experienced when they were moving without being clear about their intention, direction or focus (Table 1).

Table 1. General themes communicated by the teacher

October 2014	November 2014	February 2015
<p>Theme: <i>Cou-de-pied</i> and <i>Retiré</i>: <i>Cou-de-pied</i> is connected to the arm from <i>fifth en bas</i> to <i>fifth en avant</i>, as the foot lifts, the pelvis lifts up in the front.</p> <p>Alignment: Stacking the body/bones to find alignment. “Find sit bones underneath you. Gather your visceral sphere. Everything is easier if the pelvis is level, the legs will just fall. Organize mini diagonals, or mini diagonal of supporting leg.”</p> <p>Autonomy of the student.</p> <p>“Arms come from your hoola hoop. Shoulder blades sliding down the back. Put the shoulder in its house” (also applies to the leg).</p>	<p>Theme: <i>Attitude</i> “baby” <i>attitude</i> to help with alignment. The leg is kept low.</p> <p>Alignment: The creases of the hips are important. Hip disassociation allows the leg to move independent of the pelvis.</p> <p>Autonomy of the student.</p> <p>“No limbo between movements.”</p>	<p>Theme: <i>Attitude</i> with zippers and mini diagonals. Leg is at full height and these cues prompt dancers to use certain muscles to align the pelvis.</p> <p>Alignment: Anchor points under sit bones and/or under shoulder blades.</p> <p>Demonstration of the autonomy that the student has gained through the tools that the teacher had been teaching all year.</p> <p>“Trust your body. Physically apply the concepts that you know. Just do it.”</p>

### Tactile Cues

From the moment the dancers began the class, it became obvious that tactile correction from the teacher, as well as student self-correction played a central role in the

internalization of ballet technique. The teaching strategies in this class were consciously implemented and strategically organized, which resulted in a structured learning environment. One strategy that the teacher used in Ballet 1, which all students that I observed had experienced, was the use of the first six classes in September to learn anatomical images associated with ITD. She stated, “I shovel every image I have at them, which is not good ...but there is an overview and I can go back to it” (personal communication, October 10, 2014). Serena reflected on these early weeks in the program and stated:

In our first week with [the teacher], she began teaching us her 'IMAGE TECH' warm up, where we use visual imagery and find various muscles, bones, and joints in our body by physically touching and initiating them...she wanted us to use internal focus and imagery to locate and understand the movement of our muscles and joints. (personal communication, June 8, 2015)

Giving the students a vocabulary of her images and anatomical concepts allowed the teacher to build on and elaborate her theories based on these foundations.

Within the observed classes the teacher had the students move from the *barre* to the centre of the room to repeat exercises and apply concepts, which included transfer of weight and postural alignment. In an interview, the teacher explained that this was the same approach that captured their attention when she first began teaching them ITD. She stated, “IMAGE TECH is interesting because it’s in the centre of the room and there is no *barre*. So I have their attention immediately because they are standing on one leg... they are going to fall over and then that’s embarrassing...” (personal communication, October 10, 2014). I observed how the students were actively engaged by the teacher challenging them to move away from the *barre* or take their hand off the *barre* multiple times each class.

Throughout the research period, whenever the dancers stood ready for the first exercise facing the *barre*, the teacher began with what I termed “the checklist.” The teacher would give cues that were related to Alexander Technique and ITD, as the students gently tapped parts of their body and/or brought their focus inward. She often began with a phrase referring to feeling the top of the head, being aware of the space above the head, or growing into the space above the head. The dancers did not all choose the same tactile cues, but many touched their finger to their ears or the top of their head. The teacher would begin moving from student to student during the *barre* offering a very light touch on selected areas of the body that needed the dancers’ awareness to accomplish the movements related to the theme of the class. For example, touching or gesturing toward the back of the supporting leg and the opposite side of the upper back were cues when standing in *cou-de pied*, *retiré* or *attitude*.

During the first observation session, the teacher’s use of touch was the first teaching strategy that I noted as different from any ballet teacher I had seen or experienced in my career. The teacher barely touched the students and moved her hands along the dancers’ bodies sometimes without touching them. With the use of light touch the teacher was obviously cuing greater concepts with the choice of location and combination of movements for her hands. Serena explained the teacher’s use of touch:

Compared to other teachers that I have had, [the teacher] corrects you in a way that is unique to each person's body. While we are at the *barre*, she comes around and helps us to find and initiate specific muscles, concepts, and coordination, just with a slight touch of her index finger, in a way that resembles that of an Alexander Technique teacher. I have had other teachers in the past approach hands-on in a more aggressive way, which I often find leaves me feeling more confused and reliant on their touch to find the muscles and coordination again. [The teacher's] "magic touch" forces me to concentrate internally and leads me to discover more about my body and how to use it efficiently for ballet. (Personal communication, June 8, 2015)

As Serena discusses in the above excerpt, it is the teacher's self-professed goal to have the students self-correct rather than be reliant on the teacher putting them into a position. Self-correction is used in part because as the teacher explained, she is not supposed to touch the students based on school policy.

### **Teaching Strategies**

Individualized attention catering to the unique body of the student was a deliberate teaching strategy. Jennifer explains, "[the teacher] very carefully analyzes each dancer and works to tailor the information in ways that will deal with their question or difficulties" (personal communication, June 1, 2015). The teacher encouraged the students to individually apply the concepts with phrases that included, "put your brain in front of it" (Table 2). She wanted the students to think and feel before they attempted the concept. She applauded their efforts with phrases including "I saw a lot of brain to body information going on" (field notes, February 2015). The teacher encouraged dialogue regarding the mind-body connection that she was working to establish by asking the students questions and/or taking time to answer student questions, as well as inviting other students to add their comments.

As a teaching strategy, the teacher used the mirror as the front of the room whenever the dancers moved into the centre of the room. The dancers were expected to maintain their internal focus while they received and applied visual feedback from themselves in the mirror. Tara explained how the teacher used the mirror differently than other teachers, expecting an internal focus to be applied while using external feedback. She stated:

The factor that has really allowed me to go deeper into the work is the success that I've experienced with being more aware of my body. Teachers always say that you need to feel the shape, not stare at yourself in the mirror. But it is extremely difficult to do that when you don't know what you're supposed to be feeling. [The teacher] finally found a way to make that common saying quite easy to understand... [The teacher's] concepts have helped me understand the skeleton that I was born with, and not only how, but specifically which muscles to use to manipulate that skeleton into shapes. (personal communication, June 9, 2015)

Despite using the mirror for visual feedback, the verbal instructions/kinesthetic advice drew the students' focus inward by focusing on the proprioception of the movements

through the application of images and concepts. An example of this dual focus was an exercise that the teacher used in all classes (in all three sessions) was *attitude* swings taken into the centre during the *barre* portion of the class. After performing *attitude* swings at the *barre*, the students moved to face the mirror and performed them in the centre. The arms came up across their chest in opposition to the lifted leg, which I assumed originated with the teacher's application of somatic practices and/or images. The music stopped after the set exercise, with the dancers having finished with their leg in *attitude derrière*. In silence the dancers slowly and thoughtfully performed *ronds de jambes en dedans* with the lifted leg *en attitude* to then transfer their weight to step forward and repeat on the other side. The dancers moved in silence and at their own pace. When they arrived at the mirror, they did not stop but repeated the exercise in reverse to travel backwards; when they ran out of space they took time to balance while waiting for their classmates to finish the exercise. The internal focus that came from the application of somatic practice, coupled with the visual feedback from the mirror made the experience unique.

### Language

In addition to tactile cues and teaching strategies, language played a central role in the teacher's communication with her students. Images and anatomical references were verbal cues given to the students to trigger kinesthetic memory. The anatomical concepts were passed to the students through light touch and verbal explanation/images. The images can also be considered kinesthetic advice given by the teacher, as the images affect both the students' somatic approach to the movement, as well as the external aesthetic and technique. During the observation period, the teacher often used dynamic images in her work. For example, the dancers were asked to perform "buoyant *pliés*," like a duck swimming who remains calm on top of the water, but is actively paddling (author's field notes date) (Table 2). This instruction references the contradiction of the smooth, sustained movement of the *plié* with the active engagement of the deep rotators to facilitate alignment. This image also addresses a common dance practice of "releasing too much into gravity; promoting heaviness rather than buoyancy" as buoyancy is promoted by the Alexander Technique (Nettl-Fiol and Vanier 10).

Images and kinesthetic advice can affect the students' performance in the same ways. In some instances, kinesthetic advice more actively changed the external movement as opposed to some images, which affected the student in more subtle ways. For example, the instances listed in the October session include the pelvis as a platter, a gram of sugar on the shoulder and a "fish-hook in the visceral sphere" to engage the lower abdominals (Table 2). All of these images when applied by the student allowed for subtle changes of alignment or engagement/understanding of muscles or alignment. In contrast, other instances on Table 2, which include quicker *passé* like a marionette, top of your head to the ceiling and shoulder blades sliding down the back made more noticeable changes to the students' performance during observation classes.

There were multiple instances of images and kinesthetic advice. For example, rather than telling the student to drop their hip while their leg is in second the teacher would instruct them to "find the house" for their leg (Table 2). This drew the focus into the hip joint and the students had to feel where their leg was "at home," or in other words in a natural alignment with the pelvis while they looked in the mirror to see if they were

achieving this alignment. Another connection she encouraged was the feeling of the foot lifting into *cou-de-pied* being connected to the use of the lower abdominals even if the foot is passing through the position as in *adage*. Additionally, when the foot moves to, or through, *cou-de-pied* the teacher suggested a string connecting the arm to the heel to encourage co-ordination of the arm and foot lifting together.

ITD provided the students with a vocabulary of images to draw from when given a verbal cue, as well as images that could be adapted to their specific needs. Tara explained, “[The teacher] is not afraid to admit that not all her concepts work for every person...she is always willing to hear alternate ideas...her vulnerability and honesty create a trusting relationship between her students and herself” (personal communication, June 9, 2015). Sara also felt confident adapting images. She stated, “I have become confident in knowing that [the teacher] wishes us to explore the concepts and figure them out for our own bodies and create more images for ourselves” (personal communication, June 3, 2015). Some of the students found that the images provided worked well and helped them achieve their desired results. Serena explained:

Her concept of the ‘tripod/pine tree’ changed my dancing forever. The idea that in my visceral centre I have the top point of the tripod (or for my case the idea of a pine tree worked better) and from that point in the front and in the back I had the two diagonal lines branching down to my hip flexors and from my hip flexors and down the energy and the ‘roots’ of my tree spreads down to the floor, almost as if my legs are so elongated that they were like roots down into the floor. The top of my ‘pine tree’ all the while is growing upwards, taller and taller, lifting my energy through the ceiling of the studio. (personal communication, June 8, 2015)

Another dancer may not have found that the pine tree image versus the tri-pod image would have changed the kinesthetic sensation of the stance. However, as Serena explained, one image “worked better” than the other when she came to individually apply the idea. Another anatomical image that Serena found effective was the teacher’s “Nutella Jar” image. Serena stated that she was able “to comprehend how my hip joints function by thinking about the rotation in my shoulder joints, while using the tool of [the teacher’s] ‘Nutella Jar port de bras’ (where my arms are curved above my head in an open 5th en haut, in the shape of a rounded jar, with the ‘thickness of Nutella in the air’, as I rotate my arms from turned in to turned out)...” (email interview, June 9, 2015) (Table 2).

The teacher’s kinesthetic advice that accompanied the images included the idea of flexibility within the vocabulary to facilitate the adaptation of the concepts for individual dancers from day to day. For example, when applying the idea of the students having “anchor points” under their sit bones or alternately under their shoulder blades, the teacher suggested that each day the anchor points needed to be re-invented. She told the students to trust their anchor points being re-invented every day. She stated, “when we sleep it all goes away and we have to re-invent every day” (field notes February 17, 2015). It is through an open-minded approach to the vocabulary of images that the teacher attempted to facilitate the students releasing tension in order to move freely.

Table 2. Images, kinesthetic advice, encouragement, and verbal cues for concepts

	October 2014	November 2015	February 2015
<b>Images and Kinesthetic Advice</b>	<p>Pelvis level during a <i>relevé</i>: like a platter with a bowl of Cheerios on it, when it bounces the cheerios land back in bowl.</p> <p><i>En attitude</i> you are the leaning tower of Pisa. Put a gram of sugar on the shoulder of the lifted leg.</p> <p>Have a fish-hook on your visceral sphere and the legs drop down.</p> <p>Lift the lower leg in quickly in <i>passé</i> like a marionette.</p> <p>Top of your head to the ceiling.</p> <p>Shoulder blades sliding down the back.</p>	<p>Nutella Arms/ scoop nutella and let the shoulder blades wrap around your ribs.</p> <p>Buoyant <i>plies</i>: a duck in a puddle. Duck's look so calm above water, but underneath they are paddling.</p> <p>Marching ants moving up the spine! The image of ants marching up the spine is used to trigger the dancer's understanding and use of their abdominal muscles and promote neutral spinal alignment.</p> <p>Move from/come up from your "unders." "Unders" refer to the sit bones, deep rotators and/or top of the hamstrings.</p> <p>Take the chair with you as you walk. Take the risk of moving forward in one piece.</p> <p>Find the house for your leg. You can do 45 degrees and little by little lift it higher.</p>	<p>Sit bones fly and front of pelvis up (level pelvis).</p> <p>Feel the top of your head and the sit bones are the bottom of the tripod.</p> <p>Play with the <i>épaulement</i>.</p> <p>Be rhythmical not nervous.</p> <p>Feel the internal sensation of coming upright.</p> <p>Eliminate the moment of hesitation in transitions.</p>
<b>Encouragement</b>	<p>Better!</p> <p>Better, nice ladies!</p>	<p>I care about you as individuals. I am not comparing you to one another.</p> <p>That's nice Sam!</p> <p>Trust yourself.</p>	<p>Your body knows more than you think it does. Trust your body.</p> <p>Inching your way through it is not necessary anymore; apply what you know.</p>

			Hold onto the things that feel good and organized.
<b>Verbal Cues</b>	Up in your “unders.”  Where are your diagonals?  Firecrackers bring you up.	How do I send my arm open? Send your arms up.  Put your brain in front of it.  How long is the waist? First rib on the gesture side.	Wide base.  Stacked anchor points.  Jets underneath you.

Note: Examples were chosen from each observation session that were repeated multiple times by the teacher and related to the overall theme of the class. Examples were also discussed in student and teacher interviews.

### **BENEFITS AND DIFFICULTIES APPLYING ITD**

This section addresses the third guiding question regarding the students’ perceived benefits of ITD, as well as difficulties with its application. The students recognized and voiced how, in their experience, this teacher worked differently than other teachers. Serena stated, “In [the teacher’s] ballet class I feel that her instruction is at such a high level of mind-body connection [that] it demands your complete commitment, openness, and internal focus (personal communication, June 8, 2015). Sara recognized the communicative qualities of the class and stated:

[The teacher’s] ballet class is a special class in the way that information is given and received. [The teacher] offers a somatic approach to getting specific results in the body with focuses on alignment, energetic lines of energy, whole-body integration, presence, energetic oppositions, dynamic ranges of the body, and more. Receiving the information is all up to the student as it takes a heightened internal focus to apply the concepts. (personal communication, June 3, 2015)

It is the teacher’s strategy of allowing the dancer to approach the work from their personal perspective, and within their physical capabilities, that resonated with multiple students who participated in email interviews. The student interviews reflected an appreciation for the teacher’s ability to allow them to be “unique artists” and dance within their bodies’ physical capacities rather than striving for an external ideal. Serena stated:

She doesn’t view her students’ bodies as objects that need to be fixed and molded into perfection, instead she sees each one of us as unique artists and gives to us valuable tools (concepts, visual imagery) to add to our tool belt to help us become the best dancers that we can be... she helps each individual strengthen their hyper

mobility and improve their limitations, not by forcing ballet's ideal standards and technique, but by allowing each dancer to find their own way to this ideal technique through their exploration of her concepts...each dancer is the sculptor of their own unique body, and it is through the medium of her instruction and concepts that we have been able to work towards and find ballet's ideal technique. (personal communication, June 8, 2015)

Serena's beneficial insight into the need for balance between stretching and strengthening in her training stems partly from the school's comprehensive conditioning program, as well as the teacher's communication regarding anatomical concepts.

The students were asked if the teacher's anatomical and somatic approach altered their relationship to ballet. The replies held common themes including the students' perception of newfound empowerment and confidence when performing in ballet classes. Tara stated:

Now that I know what muscles I need to engage, or relax, or elongate when I am moving, I could truly close my eyes and establish a properly aligned shape. That factor has shifted my mindset of ballet, from being a genre of dance that only looks "beautiful" from the front, where the mirror tells me I look pretty; to a genre of dance that feels full bodied, and takes up space in all directions, where "beautiful" means confident and powerful. (personal communication, June 9, 2015)

Another aspect of the method that appealed to the students was the idea that anatomically based ballet training could facilitate success, efficiency of movement and improved technique in other forms of dance. The shift from the demands of the external aesthetic of ballet to an internal focus and motivation was experienced and appreciated by all of the students who responded to the email interviews. As Jennifer explained, the students felt free to manipulate and adapt the concepts as needed (personal communication, June 1, 2014).

Sara explained her perspective on ballet technique shifted when she began to apply the teacher's concepts. She stated:

I now think of ballet as a sort of systematic approach to energy and alignment. I used to think that I did not have the "ballet body" and therefore, that I would never be able to do ballet well. That is a completely false statement. Ballet is a functional organization of the body. When I apply [the teacher's] concepts my body feels good and I feel connected in ways that allows more freedom in my body. (personal communication, June 3, 2015)

Sara's ideas that ballet is both a "functional organization of the body," and a "systematic approach to energy and alignment," are complex and multifaceted notions that were explored within the teacher's classes.

Students found the technique useful when dealing with injury, as well as chronic conditions that affect their dance technique. Tara revealed that she had dealt with scoliosis all of her life and there were concepts that helped her to better negotiate her ballet technique. Tara explained:

The ideas that involve the torso in relation to back gestures work really well for me. I have dealt with pretty severe scoliosis my whole life, so back gestures were always confusing and challenging to me. [The teacher's] concepts of opposition in the torso and back leg helped me to understand the directions that happen inside and outside my body while creating those shapes. (personal communication, June 9, 2015)

Gaining a better understanding of their dancing bodies was a theme of the personal communications and in this case resulted in Tara feeling able to deal with a chronic physical situation.

Although Jennifer did not have a chronic condition, she dealt with “various injuries” while at the school. She revealed that she met with the teacher privately for coaching regarding different “tools” that would help her recover from and prevent injury (personal communication, June 1, 2015). Similarly, Sara had sustained two injuries while at the school and stated that since applying the teacher's concepts she had been “injury free” and she felt she has “less daily strain” on her body (personal communication, June 3, 2015).

### **Difficulties Applying ITD**

This section addresses some of the students' perceived difficulties in applying ITD to all of their dance technique classes. The teacher expressed frustration when discussing her position opposite ballet teachers who are taking different approaches to ballet technique. She understood that the application of her concepts was difficult when the students were faced with alternative modes of ballet instruction that did not lend themselves to the internal focus that her approach warranted. Serena echoed the teacher's concerns as she described her first year at the school. She stated:

My first year in training with [the teacher] was a little frustrating. I had another ballet teacher during the same year that focused on different aspects of ballet. I always tried to apply [the teacher's] concepts in the other class, but oftentimes, I struggled to reach the places I could get to in [the teacher's] classes. This place that I could reach in [the teacher's] class [included] a sensitivity to my body that allowed me to easily control my body and therefore, have much more confidence. (personal communication, June 3, 2015)

Serena's comment reflects the teacher's realization that the students had to be patient with themselves in her class in order to facilitate the internal focus needed to apply the concepts. The teacher explained that she had to teach the new students to focus and endure the longer more internally focused *barre* work, which resulted in her strategies of taking *barre* exercises into the centre as well as having the students perform corrections as she gave them (personal communication, October 10, 2014).

Another challenge to the application of the anatomical concepts and imagery was the students misunderstanding of the anatomical cues. Tara explained:

One of [the teacher's] concepts that has not worked for me is the idea of the Sartorius coming forward and up (to help turnout). Unfortunately, I think that I took that concept too far and began to underuse my deep outward rotators...I just misunderstood that the Sartorius comes forward AS WELL AS the deep outward rotators engage: they are partners. (personal communication, June 9, 2015)

In this case the student realized her misinterpretation. However, it stands to question how many other dancers misunderstood the concepts or could not grasp the vocabulary at all.

## CONCLUSION

The teacher's awareness of facilitating student success in other classes illustrates the innovation of horizontal mentoring in ballet. In their study, psychologists Howard Gardner and Mia Keinänen (2004) illustrate the dichotomy of mentoring relationships within the arts using opposing examples of ballet choreographer George Balanchine and modern dance choreographer Anna Halprin to explore the mentoring process and investigate how an "individual's goals, practices and values are transmitted across generations" (172). Vertical mentoring is a relationship in which the mentor is the all-knowing guru. In direct opposition to having one God-like teacher, horizontal mentoring is comprised of the mentor allowing some degree of autonomy for the student, as well as a network of mentors. As the data in this case study illustrates, the innovation of incorporating somatic practices in ballet pedagogy facilitates horizontal mentoring, which fosters the dancers' wellness and well being.

Although the inclusion of somatic practice in ballet has sufficient psychological benefits to warrant its addition, it also has the potential to change not *what* is taught in dance but *how* it is taught (Burnidge 37). The teacher began her teaching career by consciously rejecting methods that had been used within her own training in order to move away from the authoritarian approach. She implemented democratic and egalitarian pedagogical values stemming from her use of somatic practices, which fostered internal focus and increased the students' inner authority. She fostered the students' autonomy through their use of inner focus and proprioception as learning tools. Furthermore, integration of somatic practices in ballet training has the potential to use the dancers' proprioception and kinesthetic awareness as tools to allow them autonomy, inner authority and physical longevity in a system of training that traditionally has not fostered those specific goals.

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