



# *Patterns of Total Body Connectivity: Head-Tail*

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Improvisation

**Master Dance Teacher**

*Specialization: Professional Education*

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# CONCEPT

## Introducing Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis (L/BMA)

L/BMA often describes movement taking in account two main aspects: the action itself, which is *what* happens, and the colors and tones that give expressiveness and meaning to movement, which is *how* it happens. In the L/BMA the “how” aspect comprises 4 main categories: Body, Effort, Shape and Space (BESS). In my improvisation exam I will focus on one of these 4 categories, namely Body.

The Body Category focuses on the actual physical body, complete with its muscles, bones and connective tissues. It addresses how the body is organized, provides information on the initiation and sequencing of movement, and is concerned with efficiency, ease and expressivity of movement (Wahl 2019, p.30).

In her book *Wisdom of the Body Moving* (1995), Hartley states that movement develops through a series of predetermined stages. She writes that there are specific patterns upon which movements are based, and that these patterns depend on the way in which movement is initiated and how it sequences through the body. She describes that the initial impulse comes in response to the external environment and the inner needs of the infant/individual, and it creates a ripple of action throughout the body, causing it to move away from or toward the stimulus.

In *Body-Mind Centering*<sup>®1</sup> this process is referred to as *Developmental Movement Patterning* (DMP). In L/BMA it appears in the Body Category under the name *Patterns of Total Body Connectivity* (PTBCs).

The DMP<sup>2</sup> and the PTBCs are based on neurological movement progressions, which are neuromuscular patterns that the infant goes through in the first approximately fourteen months of life. These patterns develop functional capabilities, which support the increase of psychological expression and the organization of the developing brain, allowing the infant to have new sensations and experiences of the world (Wahl 2019, p.34).

There are six Patterns of Total Body Connectivity. These are: Breath, Core-Distal, Head-Tail, Upper-Lower, Body-Half and Cross-Lateral. On my exam I will present an improvisation exercise focusing on *Head-Tail*. According to the description in Colleen Wahl's book *Laban/Bartenieff Movement Studies* (2019), *Head-Tail* patterning highlights the developing awareness and articulation of the vertical line of the body: the spine. In her words, “it is a snake-like axis that can be fluid and supple or firm and sturdy”. She writes that “the head-tail pattern is characterized by two distinct ends that are brought into relationship with each other”, and she adds that Irmgard Bartenieff used to refer to the head end and the tail end of the spine as means to cueing movement (Wahl 2019, p.45).

Besides these six patterns that comprise the PTBCs, in BMC there are others, for example the Mouthing Pattern, which unfolds at the Prebirth and Birth phases, and between the Core-Distal (Navel Radiation in BMC) and Head-Tail. What is observed is the ability of the infant to initiate its own movement in a purposeful way, with conscious intent. This happens in the utero, and the fetus can find and suck its thumb. After birth, the infant is motivated by the need to find food to survive,

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<sup>1</sup> *BMC* is an approach to movement and a method of somatic practice developed by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen. It looks for ways to experience and embody each of the body systems, utilizing movement, touch, voice and mind.

<sup>2</sup> In *BMC* there are other Developmental Patterns like Mouthing, Pre-Spinal and Spinal.

the mouth will reach towards the source, drawing the head with it. The movement initiated at the mouth will reverberate down the spine (Hartley 1995, p.47).

### Possibilities of Application in Class

I am very interested in seeing movement through the lens of L/BMA, it shows me different perspectives of producing movement and instigates me to think not only analytically but also philosophically about movement.

Head-Tail Patterning in a very effective tool to work with in dance classes, it can be used in a variety of ways, fulfilling purposes as teaching students about body connectivity, allowing them to work on their range of motion and on awareness of movement.

It can be integrated in a warm-up to mobilize the vertebrae, bringing suppleness in the joints and awareness of the upper body and its connection with the lower limbs.

It can also be used as a tool to explore the full range of spinal mobility in the 3 axis and planes (vertical, horizontal and sagittal), hence working with flexions, extensions and rotations of the spine; the teacher can invite the students to explore mobility within one plane and to find pathways to move from one plane to another.

Another possibility of application is on improvisation sessions, in which the teacher invites the students to play with various initiations coming from one end of the spine and allowing these to sequence through the spine, all the way to the other end.

### Content of the Exercise

The improvisation exercise comprises an exploratory activity in which the students will deal with both ends of their spinal cord, the connectivity between them and their relation with space.

There will be three phases: 1<sup>st</sup> working with flexions on the floor; 2<sup>nd</sup> exploring range of motion in standing initiated also from the mouth (flexion, extension and rotation of the spine); 3<sup>rd</sup> working with initiations from mouth (also head) and tail plus sequencing on three levels (low, middle, high).

### Intention and Aim of the Exercise

Within the framework where the exercise takes place, the students are invited to turn their attention to how the body, in an integral way, reacts when movement is initiated at one end of the spinal cord. Aimed is a body experience with a focus on body connectivity, which enables movement initiations to travel all along the spine till its opposite end, hence mobilizing its whole length.

The initiation can move towards the spine, causing a “pushing” action; or it can move away from the spine, in this case causing a “pulling” action.

## Structure of the Exercise

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The exercise will be held in 3 phases:

1. Exploration: starting position is the starfish on the back
  - a. Lateral Flexions a couple of times feeling the connection between head and tail;
  - b. Roll onto the knees and move forward onto the hands (table position), do a couple of waves mobilizing the whole length of the spine; by rolling the pelvis backward go into flexion, by rolling it forward go into extension;
  - c. Take a step forward, bring the other foot, roll up letting the tail facing down and feeling the snake-like movement of the spine
2. Initiations followed by sequencing: starting position is standing (Mouthing Pattern)
  - a. Using one hand in front of the mouth as representation of an apple - start movement from the mouth, letting it guide head motion, which reverberates throughout the spine;
  - b. Without the hand as support, go on with forward flexions and extensions in the horizontal axis<sup>3</sup>, lateral flexions in the sagittal axis and rotations in the vertical axis
3. Initiations followed by sequencing: traveling in standing or on the floor (Head-Tail Patterning)
  - a. start movement from either head (also mouth) or tail, letting it reverberate throughout till the other end of the spine;
  - b. differentiation: initiation going toward the spine or away from the spine; it creates a chain reaction all along the spine;
  - c. use the 3 levels (low, middle and high), try moving from one level to the other

Before the execution of the exercise, there will be no warm up. I assume that the students are warm.

## Pedagogical Method

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To communicate the task to the students I will use movement demonstration as well as spoken language, through which I intend to generate images of movement initiation and sequencing.

The use of a mirror will not be a relevant tool, since the intention of the exercise is to refine the perception of body reactions and not their visual effect.

The music<sup>4</sup> that will be used should create a welcoming atmosphere in class and provide the students with impulses for their exploratory activity.

## References

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- Hartley, Linda. (1995). *Wisdom of the body moving: An introduction to body-mind centering* (2nd ed.). North Atlantic Books Berkeley
- Wahl, Colleen. (2019). *Laban/Bartenieff movement studies: Contemporary applications*. Human Kinetics

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<sup>3</sup> The axis are not fixed in the space, instead they have orientation in the student's own body

<sup>4</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> phase: Mono Desire, Relax Mix – Manu Delago; 2<sup>nd</sup> phase: Madera, Rapossa Remix – AnuT & MoM; 3<sup>rd</sup> phase: Reminiscence – Dante Bucci