



REFLECTION

MASTER'S THESIS

Module 10

Master Dance Teacher 3

Specialization: Professional Education

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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	3
2. IMPLEMENTATION OF MY MASTER'S THESIS	4
2.1 STRUCTURE AND CONTENT	4
2.2 CLASS 1	5
2.2.1 PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS	5
2.2.2 DEVELOPMENT AND ACHIEVEMENTS	5
2.3 CLASS 2	6
2.3.1 PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS	6
2.3.2 DEVELOPMENT AND ACHIEVEMENTS	6
2.4 EXAM	7
2.4.1 PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS	7
2.4.2 DEVELOPMENT AND ACHIEVEMENTS	8
2.5 LEFT-OUT EXERCISES	9
2.6 WORKING WITH MUSIC	9
3. ORAL DEFENSE	10
4. CONCLUSION	11
5. REFERENCES	11
STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP	12

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper reflects on the application of my Master's Thesis "Sensing and Feeling as Principles for Restoring Tonus Adaptability in Dance Practitioners", which comprises the presentation of principles stemming from two methods of somatic practice – Body-Mind Centering® and Eutonie, and a series of three classes designed to foster body and movement awareness.

I worked with students of the second year of the Bachelor of Arts Dance program of the Palucca University of Dance Dresden. My classes took place on the university's campus from December 13 to December 15, 2022 during the regularly scheduled class in Contemporary and Modern Dance (ZT/MT).

My research practice is grounded in the Experiential Learning Theory proposed by John Dewey¹ at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century. His educational theory is based upon the notion that learning occurs most effectively through having experiences. Another pillar of my research is Somatic Education, which emerged around the same time in different parts of the globe and is still evolving to the present day.

The aim of the classes was to offer the students several ways to access and deal with Tonus Fixation and Tonus Regulation (Ferreira de Araujo, 2022, pg. 12), focusing primarily on conscious bodywork, efficient use of muscle-fascial tonus applied in solo dancing and partnering, and the search for intersections between Functionality and Expressiveness of movement.

Throughout the 3 days of classes, 3 principles of the Eutonie method were introduced, namely *Touch*, *Transport* and *Contact*; as well as the Body-Mind Centering® (BMC) method and its exploration of movement arising from the Nervous and Fluid Systems of the human body.

Furthermore, the classes explored the idea that Sensing is linked to the Nervous System and Feeling to the Fluid System (in the sense of BMC®). Students were offered several exploratory activities with the goal of accessing these systems and addressing the perception of internal and external stimuli, the connection with one's emotions, and the use of these sources for movement exploration (triggers of Action).

¹ Among others.

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF MY MASTER'S THESIS

As foreseen in the class plan, the carried out activities were rearranged throughout the 3 days, aiming at the best use of the class time and the achievement of my final goal, which was the exploration of movement in pairs, wherein 3 aspects should be present – the ability to adapt to the partner's tonus (“listen” to the partner), using all 5 senses plus the kinesthetic sense, as well as the fluid and flexible quality of movement, explored through the body's Fluid Systems and the use of the gymnastic ball.

It was for me an important, insightful and challenging experience to work with this particular group of students. I had the opportunity to apply for the first time the theories presented in my master's thesis. I could observe which aspects worked for this particular group of students and which aspects proved to be obstacles to the realization of my purpose². Many of the students attended all three classes, some of them were not present in the second and third classes, and some just watched. Nine students were actively part of my exam.

In the following sections I will elaborate on the implementation of my class concept as well as my perspective on the achievements and difficulties experienced in this process. I will draw a line of development, starting from the first two days of preparation, culminating in my MA exam.

2.1 Structure and Content

I outlined in the table below the class structure that was implemented throughout the 2 days of preparation and in the exam. From a total of 21 class activities planned in my master's thesis, 13 were implemented and 8 were not.

In the process of developing my class concept and the mentioned activities, it was known to me that there would not be enough time to carry out all the planned material; however, I chose to ideologically outline a structural framework that could, under ideal conditions (e.g. a full week of work with the group of students), address in its depth and integrity the concepts presented in my thesis.

The narrowing of this structural framework into a smaller and more concise set of activities did not negatively affect the implementation of my concept. Nevertheless, looking at the final result of the exam, if I could reconsider my choices regarding the organization of the implemented exercises, I would change one of them: Instead of having taught two movement phrases, I would have taught only one ("China"); thus I would have had time to introduce the subject of Fluid Systems with due care and caution through the

² Another aspect of my purpose, which I consider to be abstract, was to foster awareness of body and movement.

activity entitled “Exploration 3 - Part 2 – *Kinesthetic Flow*”, which, despite having been planned for the second day, was not fulfilled due to lack of time. I will return to this topic in the following sections.

CLASS 1		CLASS 2	EXAM
1	Tonus Adaptation “ <i>Foam Roller</i> ”	Set Phrase 1 “ <i>Waves and Spirals</i> ” [left + right]	Tonus Adaptation “ <i>Foam Roller</i> ”
2	Exploration 1 “ <i>Feeling Gravity through the Feet</i> ”	Set Phrase 2 “ <i>China</i> ” [right] remembering quick	Warm-up 3 “ <i>Rocking</i> ”
3	Warm-up 1 “ <i>Grabbing the Bones</i> ”	Touch in Pairs “ <i>Body Connectivity</i> ”	Exploration 3 - Part 2 – “ <i>Kinesthetic Flow</i> ”
4	Set Phrase 2 “ <i>China</i> ” [right]	Exploration 2 “ <i>Continuous Pathways</i> ”	Set Phrase 1 “ <i>Waves and Spirals</i> ” [left + right]
5	Floor Crossing 1 “ <i>Torso Liquidity</i> ”	Floor Crossing 3 “ <i>The Arc of Force</i> ”	Set Phrase 2 “ <i>China</i> ” [right + left]
6		Exploration 4 “ <i>Gymnastic Ball</i> ”	Floor Crossing 3 “ <i>The Arc of Force</i> ”
7		Exploration 5 “ <i>Partnering</i> ”	Exploration 4 “ <i>Gymnastic Ball</i> ”
8			Exploration 5 “ <i>Partnering</i> ”

2.2 Class 1

2.2.1. Preliminary Considerations

Before entering the classroom, I had no particular expectations about how I would work with this group. Four weeks before the exam I had watched a contemporary dance class with the students via virtual platform, which left me with the impression that the group is not, from my point of view, particularly familiar with Floorwork, e.g. *yielding, pushing and rolling*. However, even though I had such an impression beforehand, I did not start my first day of class with prior expectations about the outcome of the class.

2.2.2. Development and Achievements

The class comprised the implementation of 5 activities, 2 of which were focused on body awareness (exercises 1 and 5 – see table above), 2 on movement exploration (exercises 2 and 3), and 1 phrase of fixed movements (number 4).

I started by laying the foundations of the class in its theoretical aspect, and I offered in parallel a body awareness activity addressing primarily the nervous system (using the Foam Roller), in which my focus remained on the awareness of two forces: Gravity and Counterpressure.

The second exercise consisted of applying the same principle, this time in standing. Then I moved on to the third exercise, an exploration of the muscular system and its function of moving the skeletal system, which

was focused primarily on addressing muscle tension and its subsequent relaxation by applying the Contract-relax principle³.

Thereafter I taught a movement sequence, only the right side though, as the class time was about to run out. Then followed the last body awareness activity, crossing the floor, in which my goal was to introduce the fluid system, however not theoretically. My intent was to address a liquid and fluid quality when rolling over solid obstacles (in this case, the dancers' own arms).

As far as I could perceive their outcomes, all 5 activities were well understood by the students. During the feedback round at the end of the class, there were two comments from the students regarding their wishes and considerations for the class: 1. For some students, it is preferable that the teacher shows the complete sequence of movements right at the very beginning, instead of showing them step by step; 2. Some students were bothered by the fact that I constantly asked them whether they have understood my proposal and whether there were any open questions.

2.3 Class 2

2.3.1. Preliminary Considerations

Class 1 reinforced my impression that the group does not have a particular familiarity with Floorwork. It took about 40 minutes to teach only the right side of the "China" sequence. As they danced the sequence, I noticed many dissonances in timing, synchronization and movement itself. I reflected on how to proceed to class 2. In conversation with Prof. Dr. Coogan, we came to the conclusion that it was necessary to make more clear to the students the specificities⁴ of the proposed movements.

Furthermore, I realized that in the second class I needed to introduce the concept of Arc-of-Force and work with the gymnastic ball – this could not be something "new" to the students in my exam.

2.3.2. Development and Achievements

The class comprised the implementation of 7 activities, 2 of which were focused on body awareness (exercises 3 and 5), 3 on movement exploration (exercises 4, 6 and 7), and 2 phrases of fixed movements (numbers 1 and 2).

I started with the new movement phrase. We did both sides. I showed the whole phrase at the beginning. I talked about some specificities of movement for the sequence, such as clarity of forms and transitions,

³ Contract-relax stretching is a form of PNF (proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation) stretching. It uses natural reflexes to further the stretching response. My objective, however, was to address primarily the relaxation of muscle tension.

⁴ Such as the alignment and flexibility between the 3 containers (pelvis, rib cage and head).

and the work with counterpoints (simultaneous attention to opposite points in space that form a line segment).

Next, I quickly recalled with the students the phrase "China", just the right side. My plan was to give more attention to this phrase in the next class; I needed to gain time so that I could proceed with my plan for the rest of this lesson.

I then introduced the activity in pairs using *touch*, which was meant to work on "body connectivity". I noticed that the students were immersed in the task, except for one or two who seemed to be only physically present in the room, with their thoughts and intentions absent. The individual movement exploration that followed confirmed my observation about the involvement of most students; they explored their movements starting from the locations stimulated by the partner and going beyond them, transforming the exploration into a beautiful improvisation, with organized movements and a clear reference to the body's gravitational center – limbs that moved in integration with the body's core.

Thereafter, I introduced the concept of Arc-of-force. I first reminded the students of the exploration we did in the previous class focusing on Gravity and Counterpressure. First standing, then table-top (I also used the word "bridge"). I noticed that the students already had experience with Contact Improvisation; nevertheless, I invited them to explore with their partners the qualities of fluidity, suppleness with constant resistance, that had been experienced on the ball, instead of reproducing figures and movements from the Contact Improvisation vocabulary (*yielding* and *pushing* – I offered as an example the image of a balloon filled with water; its ability to mold itself to the solid object on which it lies, without collapsing).

2.4 Exam

2.4.1. Preliminary Considerations

In the process of organizing a framework for my exam I came across an important question: I had not until now properly introduced the Fluid System (although I had already introduced the ball, and a floor crossing with rolling on the arms, both of which address the Fluid System). I asked myself if I should undertake a new activity on the day of my exam; the answer was "yes". However, I did not consider the possibility that a more detailed introduction would be necessary, compared to the one I had prepared to offer to the students.

I then designed a class plan in which I would address the Nervous System using the Foam Roller, then transition to the Fluid System using the idea of the 3 "water-filled" containers⁵, then do the two movement phrases and finish with the full set of exercises for the Arc-of-force + gym ball + partnering. Thus, I would

⁵ The issue surrounding the use of this term will be addressed in the next section.

have, theoretically, addressed much of the scope of my Master's Thesis - Nervous and Fluid systems, engaged in action with the partner.

2.4.2. Development and Achievements

I worked with two pathways of accessing movement, namely the Nervous System and the Fluid System. The partial outcomes throughout the class as well as the final result (last exploratory activity in pairs) indicate that the students were able to use the principles within the proposed exercises to get in touch with their own ability to sense their bodies.

The activity using the Foam Roller resulted in good outcomes on students' body awareness. They spoke of having felt more sensitivity in their backs; they interpreted it as a sensation of "opening". There was then a transition to the exercise with *oscillations*, lying on the floor, as an introduction to the Fluid System, which ended in standing, where the exploration addressing the Fluid System indeed started.

The exploration of the Fluid System partially had good results. In the feedback round at the end of the exercise, I was informed that in the theoretical sense of my proposal, my directives had not been clearly understood. However, my observation of the practice of the exercise informed me that most students were immersed in their exploration of fluid qualities of movement; the improvisation seemed successful to me. In reflection at the end of the exam, two ways occurred to me through which I could have made the specific approach of the exercise more clear:

1. Bring to class a balloon with water, not too full, not too empty, not too tense and not too loose; I would have invited the students to hold the balloon and notice its resilient quality, at the same time its ability to mold itself to an object of contact, without losing its own consistency.
2. Applying touch in pairs: the receiver of the touch stands or sits; the touch giver places one hand under the sternum and the other between the receiver's shoulder blades, then applies gentle pressure and makes small circular movements with the hand, seeking to access the innermost structural layers of the rib cage. My experience in somatic practice informs me that such an exercise facilitates feeling the fluid quality of a body part.

I would also like to point out another issue that contributed to the lack of clarity within my directives: In the exploration of the Fluid System I used the word "container" to refer to the pelvis, rib cage and head. I realize that this term led students to produce an image of something having rigid boundaries (edges, rims), when in fact my intent was to explore opposite qualities, i.e. flexible, permeable boundaries. "Membrane" is a term that probably would have caused a better understanding of the directives of the exercise.

The class continued with the two fixed movement sequences. I noticed a qualitative increase in the execution of the movements. Most students performed them within the musical structure (counts) and the specificities that I had indicated:

Phrase “Waves”: focus on clarity of shapes and transitions, as well as the idea of counterpoints (emphasizing linearity and range of motion);

Phrase “China”: focus on yielding-pushing-rolling, as well as the alignment and flexibility between the 3 containers. In the last run-through I invited the students to dance with musical freedom, and to always keep the connection between all limbs and the solar plexus (moving towards and away from it).

Afterwards I implemented the whole series of exercises focusing on the Arc-of-force, plus ball, plus partnering. This section of the class seemed successful to me. As the students crawled around the room (looking for the bridge/Arc-of-force) I noticed that they had actually found the point where the counterpressure coming from the feet and hands meet each other. In the exploration on the ball, I noticed that the students felt comfortable to experiment, to look for new possibilities and range of motion; some students slipped off the ball, which was part of the learning process (and which informs me about the availability and openness of many students to this moment in the class – good!). The exploration in pairs had a very fluid quality and much attention to the partner (listening skills). Fluidity can be linked to the Fluid System (feeling) and the state of attention to the Nervous System (sensing and perceiving). So, this was the moment where the students condensed everything that was worked on throughout the 3 classes into an improvisational moment. It was beautiful and fluid.

2.5 Left-out Exercises

1. Warm-up 2 “Habitual Pathways”
2. Warm-up 4 “Negotiating with Gravity”
3. Floor Crossing 2 “Falling Sideways”
4. Set Phrase 3 “Torsion”
5. Exploration 3 -Part 1- “Kinesthetic Sense”
6. Improvisation 1 “Sensing Touch”
7. Improvisation 2 “Hearing”
8. Improvisation 3 “Vision”

2.6 Working with Music

The musical accompaniment had a supportive function, it created an atmospheric sound cushion for the exploratory activities. Before each of the three classes, I explained to the musician the class structure, followed by my expectations about the musical accompaniment for each of the exercises that would be implemented on the day.

At my request, the musician kept the dynamics of sounds between *mezzo piano* and *forte* (mp - f), and the color of his sounds remained between soft and low-energy (with the exception of the "Grabbing the Bones" exercise, where there was a moment of *fortissimo* "ff" dynamics and fast tempo).

For the most part, the execution of the proposed exercises was guided simultaneously by my voice. Thus, a directive that I gave to the musician was that my speech should be heard by the students at all times. Sometimes the music became too loud, covering up my voice; at these moments I kindly asked the musician to lower the dynamics of the musical accompaniment.

There was a moment on the second class that I participated together with the students in the "Partnering" activity (there were not an even number of students). At this moment I experienced the musical impulse from a new perspective, I had an "inside look" at the interaction between movement exploration and musical accompaniment. I finished the exercise with a feeling of extreme satisfaction, and I knew (felt) that the music had contributed to it.

3. ORAL DEFENSE

It took place 5 minutes after the end of the practical exam. The examiners presented their observations regarding the implementation of my master's thesis, and they asked me questions about how I could have better solved some problems that emerged during my exam.

Some of the points that were raised:

1. I did not address the "flat-back" execution, which raised the question:
 - a. What directives can be presented to the students regarding the execution of this figure?
2. The necessity to look for more concrete terms to address topics about which the students have little knowledge. This observation was based on a lack of clarity about my presentation of the Fluid System to the students (among others).
 - a. The examiners then asked me how I could have dealt with the students' uncertainties. I then mentioned the examples that were already given in the section 2.4.2.
3. The two movement sequences which were taught had a very similar musical structure, however the specificities addressed by each one of them were quite different (mentioned in section 2.4.2.).

The examining board then gave me the note for my Master's thesis (written part) and said they would contact me to inform about the note for the practical exam.

4. CONCLUSION

My Master's Thesis and its implementation in the classroom is part of my research on the intersection between Somatics and Dance Pedagogy. The process of researching, writing and applying the proposed concepts revealed to me the pioneer character of such an endeavor.

I believe that the implementation of my concept was successful, both in abstract terms, emphasizing the subjective nature of Somatic Practice – movement awareness; and in concrete terms, considering the evolution of the students' quality of movement over the three days of classes.

One aspect that was pointed out to me by the students was the lack of clarity in the transmission of the class material, in particular the introduction of the Fluid System. This reveals to me the importance of continuing to learn about the activity of teaching, which for me lies inexorably in the care and involvement as competencies of the teacher; it also reveals to me the interest and readiness of the students towards their own learning process.

One question that will guide my future research within the field of dance pedagogy is: How to remain open and present to the variety of students and their learning processes that a teacher may encounter in the classroom, and also how to be able to respond supportively to this diversity?

5. REFERENCES

Ferreira de Araujo, Isaac (2022). *Sensing and feeling as principles for restoring tonus adaptability in dance practitioners* [Master's Thesis]. Palucca Hochschule für Tanz Dresden

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

**(§27, para. 1 - studies and examination regulations of the Palucca Hochschule für Tanz
Dresden)**

I hereby certify that I wrote this Reflection.

I wrote independently and did not use any sources and tools other than those specified by me. I used the DeepL-Translator to verify words and sentences.

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Leipzig

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Isaac Ferreira de Azevedo". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.