

Somatics: A growing and changing field.

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Abstract:

With the recent popularity of somatics in dance classes, choreography, kinesiological studies, dance therapy, dance educational theory, body studies, cultural studies, and other facets of dance education, it is time to take a look at how we define and apply somatics to diverse areas within our discipline. The use of somatic practices has increased over the last twenty years. Many dance teachers now incorporate somatic practices and principles into their dance classes and somatics has become a growing area of study within dance. However, somatics has meant different things to different people. As Sylvie Fortin points out in her article, many dance teachers use terms such as body practices, body-mind techniques, body-mind studies, body therapies, and so forth to describe methods that work to integrate bodily experiences and move inward to embrace inner knowing. However, these terms reflect the difficulty of language that separates the ideas of body and mind, even though these very terms strive to tie them together.

Keywords: somatics | dance education | kinesiology | somatic practices | dance teachers

Article:

With the recent popularity of somatics in dance classes, choreography, kinesiological studies, dance therapy, dance educational theory, body studies, cultural studies, and other facets of dance education, it is time to take a look at how we define and apply somatics to diverse areas within our discipline. The use of somatic practices has increased over the last twenty years. Many dance teachers now incorporate somatic practices and principles into their dance classes and somatics has become a growing area of study within dance. However, somatics has meant different things to different people. As Sylvie Fortin points out in her article, many dance teachers use terms such as body practices, body-mind techniques, body-mind studies, body therapies, and so forth to describe methods that work to integrate bodily experiences and move inward to embrace inner knowing. However, these terms reflect the difficulty of language that separates the ideas of body and mind, even though these very terms strive to tie them together.

Somatics has recently been used in an effort to avoid the body-mind dichotomy and view a more consistent holistic view as well as to describe a developing field related to the inner subjective

experience of the body and its extension out to the social world. The term “somatics” arose in the 1970s when Thomas Hanna coined the word. With its inherent embrace of inner bodily knowledge and authority, it fit well with the profession of dance, in which the body is used as an instrument of expression and communication. With the parallel growth of the “human potential movement” in the 1960s and 1970s, the body became a valued instrument for self-exploration. The term soon became adopted by dancers, dance educators, dance philosophers, choreographers, dance therapists, and dance anthropologists.

Currently, somatics is evolving into a subdiscipline in dance. Researchers are exploring somatic theory and practice while practitioners are incorporating somatics throughout the dance world, in educational, artistic, and therapeutic venues.

Although all these areas are significant and reinforce the value of somatics in each separate area, this special issue focuses on the applications and trends in somatic education. My article explores the applications of somatics to public school and university curricula. It addresses somatic knowledge as content and methodology in dance education, proposes strategies for bringing the body back into dance and dance curricula, and explores issues of cultural diversity within dance and somatic education. Martha Eddy addresses programmatic aspects of somatics in the public sector. She investigates the fit of somatics within various institutions and settings including universities, professional schools, and community programs. She explores issues such as certification and academic degrees in somatic study. Sylvie Fortin provides a transcultural perspective. She explores international trends in somatic practice and shifts that have taken place within specific cultural contexts. Fortin’s article shows how culture and nationality play a role in defining concepts such as somatics and body practice.

Together these articles provide a global and far reaching sense of somatics as a field within the dance world. They offer perspectives and potential applications of somatics in diverse contexts and venues. This set of articles is by no means a total summary or final account of somatic possibilities. But it is a start.