

# A Reflection - Looking Beyond the Muscles at the Movement

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It was not easy. But, yes, I did manage to attend Betsy Kagan's four hour, post conference workshop, (in "The Fifth Interdisciplinary World Congress on Low back and Pelvic Pain"), along with two other dance therapists from Melbourne. I endured a very "difficult" process, trying to register locally for an "international" conference held here in my home town! In fact, one little pearl that I can't stop myself from relating, was the arrival of an email of acceptance for my application (from somewhere in Europe) two weeks after the actual event!

Betsy's presentation at this huge medical conference was titled "Addressing Injury, Pain and Rehabilitation through Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis (LMA/BF): A Holistic Model of Movement". A large group of people from various parts of the world attended. She began with an overview of LMA and after this focused on Bartenieff Fundamentals<sup>sm</sup> using both discussion and experientials. It was an excellent presentation, so much so that many stayed long beyond the official end of the session to hear more from Betsy on this topic.

Prior to her presentation, Betsy told me that a large component of actual conference papers were "evidence-based" studies regarding the role of the core muscles in the management of Low Back Pain (LBP), expressing some slight frustration when she said "*all those days of talking about muscles and no*

*movement*"! A situation that really doesn't surprise us at all! In her presentation she challenged the current management of LBP that has been developed from the evidence-based studies. Targeting this research perspective, she suggested that the biomechanical model, on which virtually all the research is based, does not offer a way of comprehending the movement pattern component of injury. Betsy and other CMA's recognize that movement patterning is actually a key issue in LBP and other chronic injuries. In an email to the ADTA listserv following this event Betsy noted that "*many studies don't address movement at all because they don't have the model to do so, but it is clearly something they are searching for. In a context like that, I am left more firmly convinced of the importance of Irmgard's legacy*". (Dec. 24, 2004)

Taught by Irmgard Bartenieff, Betsy says that using LMA/BF has been a lifelong process for her. A back injury, following her pregnancy (1977), left her in pain and disabled. Betsy connected herself with the healing potential of Irmgard's work, undertaking her own rehabilitation, and eventually managing to return to dance. (LIMS website - *Betsy Kagan - CMA of the Month, March/April 2004.*) Betsy's firm conviction of the importance of Irmgard's legacy and of its value in addressing problems such as LBP came through her excellent presentation clearly. Through BF's and the example of her own personal rehabilitation, Betsy offered a challenge to the practical management of LBP that has emerged from the evidence-based studies.

Betsy began with LMA experientials, incorporating Effort (energy patterns), Space Harmony (the spatial patterns in the kinaesphere), and the Shape (internal processes forming the body). Involving attendees in movement, she helped us look at our individuality through the lenses of Effort, Space, and Shape, showing us how we combine these LMA components to form movement sequences which create our individuality. She also illustrated our three-dimensionality (our external volume) and the importance of breath (our internal volume). She stressed the importance of the breath as part of ALL movement as well as being integral to the grounding process. Betsy noted that "holding" (i.e., too much "control" of the core muscles) interferes with and compromises the essential functions of breathing, two of which are to provide opportunity for weight assertion and sense of self.

Clarity of spatial intent through the movement of

our bones was another of Betsy's points. She talked about the extraordinary architecture of the body, such as the shape of the femur, and the function of the scapula. Understanding and working with the spatial intent of the skeleton can give us a relationship with gravity and the energetic support for movement. The skeleton also provides us with key proprioceptive information, such as a feeling of the location of body weight. Using LMA/BF, Betsy tied structure, function, and movement into a wonderful package.

Betsy pointed out that early developmental sequences that act and underly and form body movement prepare us for upright bipedal work with "*spine, pelvis and limbs designed to interact with a three-dimensional spatial environment*". (Kagan, 2004). The early developmental sequences are important in understanding the movement patterns of BF. For example, head-tail connectivity is key in dynamic alignment. Other developmental principles, such as the differentiation and integration of the upper and lower body, or the left and right sides, also support adult movement patterns. Betsy made the point that in dysfunction people sometimes regress to earlier movement patterns to support the injury and prevent pain. This can cause many protective patterns which increase dysfunction in LBP.

She also noted key movement ideas that are inherent in BF, such as:

1. Stability from the connectivity allows Mobility.
2. Functional (or dynamic) alignment involves connectivity of head and tail, as well as knowing your choices in space.
3. The role of the spine is to be available to move into space. For example, if the spine is held too firmly (or fixed as is often suggested in the "core control" mentality), one's choices and options are reduced, and one develops abnormal movement patterns.
4. Core muscles (such as the transversus abdominus and multifidus, often highly emphasized in LBP research) will be activated naturally as a result of functional movement patterning.
5. Correction of movement dysfunction should be taught as a functional and expressive movement experience and not in prescriptive exercise format.

Betsy very ably and expertly demonstrated these ideas, using for example, a workshop participant's walk. She retrained the overall movement pattern, working with a simple weight shift, or arm swing, without any emphasis on "activating deep core muscles". She showed that BF's approach was not about repeating an exercise but going through a

connected, thinking, feeling and satisfying movement experience. Her teaching was impressive, as it gave the participants a feeling of personal achievement in the difference they were able to make for themselves in their movement patterning. With very minor deviations or habits in the ways they executed various patterns, many people had that sort of 'Ah Ha' experience. Collectively we sighed, "That feels so much better to me"; "Why haven't I noticed that before?" Betsy was indeed a skilled movement analyst and able to pinpoint and rectify problems.

A quick experience of the Basic Six "Fundies" (core functional patterns) was also given. She showed that the BF's are a body-based approach that can embody the Efforts, Shape and Space components of LMA.

This presentation was excellent "food for thought", particularly for me with my background in physiotherapy, dance therapy, and belief in the value of the Pilates approach. (In deeper discussion with Betsy - who, by the way, worked with Joseph Pilates - she said that she thought that he would never have meant for the concept of core stability to become such a static holding exercise to be applied to problems such as LBP.) I was left with the phrase "train the movement and not the muscle" firmly with me, an overall sense of the need and satisfaction of 'interconnectedness' in movement and heightened awareness of my various skeletal connections and body architecture. I was made more aware of my intention in space and ongoing support of the breath as an integral part of my movement. No, it wasn't exactly dance therapy - but what a basis from which a dance therapist could work! The words 'going with the flow' come to mind. Yes, very holistic and a wonderful foundation for movement, dance, and dance therapy.

**Reference:** Kagan, B. (2004). *Workshop Paper. 'Looking Beyond the Muscles at the Movement' 5<sup>th</sup> Interdisciplinary Conference presentation. Low Back and Pelvic Pain. Melbourne.*

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