

Reflections on Connections and Influences



A very inspiring and successful professional development day organised by the DTAA and Hanny Exiner Memorial Foundation took place on Saturday 4th September at Cecil Street Studio.

Bella Grossberg presented the first workshop, *The Dance that connects Feldenkrais and Dance Therapy*, which involved an Awareness Through Movement (ATM), gentle Feldenkrais session that led into a beautiful personal dance experience. The connection between the two was clearly demonstrated by the enrichment and support of the inner dance that resulted for those involved in the group. Susan Maling's workshop, *The Conscious Body and Emotional Expression* followed providing an experiential exploration of Wilhelm Reich's (originator of body-based psychotherapy) influence on her work. Shona Innes then presented *The Conscious Body and Emotional Expression*. She touched on the Alexander Technique, but demonstrated in particular how Ideokinesis can facilitate dance experience and integrate imagination and body and allow a deep connection to spontaneous creativity.

My Experience of "The Dance that connects Feldenkrais and Dance Therapy" - presented by Bella Grossberg

Ana Irene Gioino

Placing the body on the rug. With the dear old skeleton inside.
Exploring slow movements. Legs. Hips. Arms.
Close to thirty dance therapy practitioners and students explore the Feldenkrais technique.
A small studio in Melbourne. Saturday morning. Early spring.
We are reflecting on the areas of the body we are working with.
I am surrounded by bodies moving in unison.
Legs. Hips. Arms.
Bella Grossberg is saying to focus on easy and pleasurable movements.
There is so much time to do it...
Bella's voice is unhurried and protective.
We are "expanding our self-awareness."
Our backs feel the rug. The legs rotate. The hip rotates.

The morning is quiet, the light is soft.
We are working slowly. Eyes are closed.
Shoulders. Head. Neck. Detecting stiff areas...

I found one! Upper back, in between shoulder blades, top of the spine.
The old stress is here, in the Feldenkrais class. It feels like a Hump.

As a shining gem in my brain, the Memory is unearthed.

*Sleeping with my mother, as a very young child. Feeling her sadness, her asthma, her inability to breathe.....
My self-awareness is expanding: I see the past engraved in my psyche and know it happened long ago, far way. I open my eyes....*

Bella's voice is weaving into my present, now. Suddenly, I am back in Cecil St. Wow! A few decades have passed from that memory which felt so vivid seconds ago.

Today, there are almost thirty dancers moving to Bella's instructions.

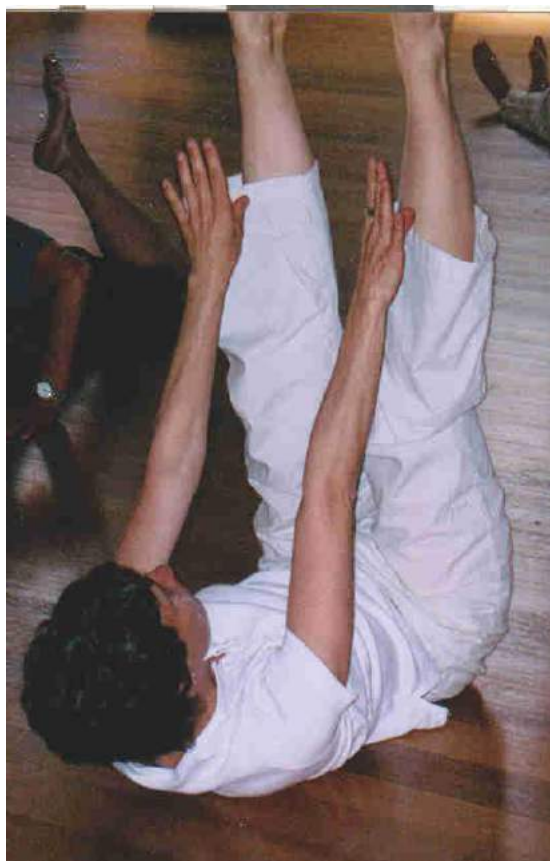
I am one of them. They are surrounding me.

Calmly and sweetly, she directs each slow sequence. Shoulders. Neck. Head.

Focusing on the ease and pleasure of movement.

I am surrounded by these bodies who are moving like mine. I am safe.
 The light is soft through the window. I am warm and comfortable.
 The atmosphere contains my memory and redimensions it.
 I realise I am “learning how to learn as if for the first time, with the curiosity and sensual delight of a young child.”*
 I keep on rotating my articulations slowly, feeling my weight on the floor.
 I still feel my Hump, as heavy as cement. It sticks to the rug and wants to take me to the past.
 It must be one of the bad habits that can become restrictive and destructive, according to what Bella wrote about Feldenkrais. I want to find a new pattern for myself, to replace this bad habit.
 We are still rotating, flexing, extending. I feel the affinity with these beings around me.

These beings patiently following Bella in this exploration which is near to a sacred



devotion. Their company in my journey gives me the power to conjure up an intuitive self-healing process.

I must make an executive decision regarding my Hump and my Painful Memory because Bella has finished the exercises. Now, we are going to start dancing so as to experience the body's response after the work on the floor. I do not want to dance with my old Hump! I have to change something, and do it quickly!

I decide to rearrange my dream and treat my hump to a revamp: it turns into a delightful gardenia bush. The top of my spine is producing my favourite flowers. The flowers drop their perfume and their petals and I feel how my back is loosening.

At the end of Bella's segment in the workshop, I was dancing close to tears.

There was a deep freedom in my dance, limbs and joints felt like floating. I did understand completely how an “ATM (Awareness through Movement) encourages people to re-connect with their creativity and intuition.”*

It had taken all this time, since childhood, for me to remember, and to recreate those images, those memories, and those feelings conditioning my body.

Thank you, Moshe Feldenkrais, for finding a way to treat my injury with the kaleidoscopic scalpel of self-awareness.

And thank you, Bella. I entered the studio as an innocent and downtrodden hunchback; I left it as the gardener of my very own inner gardenia plant, which can bloom twelve months a year, from now on.

This IS a real pleasure!

***Grossberg B. The dance that connects Feldenkrais with Dance Therapy, in DTTA Quarterly, Volume 3, No. 2, 2004, page 15**

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 and intuition.”**

The Conscious Body and Emotional Expression, by Susan Maling (Crouch)

Jenny Czulak Riley

It was a delight to be in Susan Maling's clear, crisp presence and to refresh mutual views on the approaches and practises we had danced while we were studying for the Grad. Cert. Dance Therapy, when was it ...? All those years ago. Susan was deeply interested in Reichian therapy during this time when she was engaged in dance therapy studies and the development of her work as dancer/teacher/therapist. For her the experience was profound and influenced her work in dance on many levels.

I remember the evening Susan brought a "Reichian" into our midst at Mooroolbeek Hall. It was an impressive evening that prompted me to find out more about this extraordinary Wilhelm Reich who believed he had solved the age old enigma that had tantalised philosophers and scientists: what was the source of the creative spirit, the "astral light"? The answer: ORGONE ENERGY which is generated by the sex act, and when accumulated in a box, gives off a blue glow! Thanks to Susan I did some reading and made some discoveries, the results of which are below in the article 'Wilhelm Reich'.

In our practical engagement with the theory Susan demonstrated how working with the breath in Reichian therapy can differ from the way we use the breath in dance. In dance the breathing is involved not in an abreactive way to gain emotional release, but to connect with the "energy component" as the body travels from functional to expressive movement. We experimented with how we might initiate movement on the out-breath, comparing that with movement impulses on the in-breath.

And we experimented with using the rhythm of the breath to connect with movements which could initiate dance. Susan introduced music, softly and slowly helping the breath to connect with feeling. A natural theme to come out of this way of working with the breath could be "opening and closing", leading in my experience to the inspiration of flowers in sunlight, the floating and flapping wings of a bird, then of an insect. In another exercise, using the breath to get energised we were offered non-evocative suggestions: "WALK! RUN! SKIP! GALLOP! TURN! STAND! CHANGE ACCELERATION! SEE WHAT COMES!" And there was a time of standing still. Then we created a movement phrase of some of the actions we'd been

experimenting with. We repeated and repeated our phrase. "Letting the body lead the dance!"

[A word about vocalising in a workshop situation: Susan emphasised that in a Reichian therapeutic session based on breathing she would encourage vocalising, "Allowing the sound!" especially on the out-breath, as it helps the jaw to hang loose.]

It was an enlightening and stimulating session and it reinforced for me the simplicity of connecting theories and ideas and harnessing them together; the pleasures of movement and dance and the opportunities for the purpose of personal growth through individual creative expression.



We are indebted to Susan Maling for her clear reminder that it was Reich who insisted to his fellow pioneers in the study of character analysis that the body of a person reflects his/her mental and emotional attitude; hence the essential target for therapy resides not merely in the mind/brain but in the whole pulsating, sensing, knowing body organism.

Ideokinesis, Alexander Technique and Dancing - led by Shona Innes

Robyn Price



I'm sitting on a bus: my head sphere, my thoracic sphere, my pelvic sphere and me.

In this position of active rest, my body still resonates with the information it received during Shona Innes' workshop: Ideokinesis, Alexander Technique and Dancing.

I was left with the feeling that it will resonate for some time, as my body considers what to do with this new experience. Simple, yet complex. This way in to the body – through the use of imagery, was easy to follow yet it opened up many possibilities. The images were strong and I am still able to recall them some weeks later.

Shona commenced the workshop with a short history of Ideokinesis covering the approaches of Lulu Schweiger (visual imagery received primarily in stillness) and Mabel Todd (using imagery to re-educate the body via the neuromuscular system) and the associated central concepts. Some of the activities Shona led were taken from a book called *Inside Motion* by John Rolland. His is a passive/receptive approach in which the image is first offered as the client lies still. The client is asked to move the image as part of the body, to see it as clearly as possible, then to let go yet keep moving. The client becomes his own observer, noticing anything about the body, the image, any sensation or feelings that arise.

The first image Shona offered was a beam of light that moved from the midpoint between our feet up through the pelvis, spine and out through the top of the head (our axis of gravity). We moved around the light beam, we explored symmetry, stability at the core and mobility away from it. What colour was the beam, did it change during the moving? We

let the image go. What do you notice? How do you move now?

The second image was the sphere. We were invited to visualise the head, thoracic and pelvic spheres, to locate and differentiate those different zones in the body. To add further information, via sensory stimulation, we investigated all dimensions of each sphere, rolling and moving, aided by the floor. This would further fill out the internal picture. Next, we moved with our three spheres. And lastly, a partner provided tactile reinforcement – touching different parts of a sphere to highlight its roundness and location. In these ways, clients gain a deeper, embodied sense of the spheres. They might become aware that one sphere feels clearer than another.

There was another, essential part of the process – stillness. After each section, we would stop for a few minutes, in constructive rest position, to allow the body to process what it had just experienced. How tempting it is to keep clients on the move. How powerful it is to stop and allow clients to receive what has been offered and find their own meaning.

A relaxation, in Alexander constructive rest position, was the final element of the workshop, ahead of a Q&A session.

It was only after I left the building that I began to understand how rich this approach could be in a dance therapy setting. Images are very concrete and accessible, they are one way to bring understanding of bodily function or malfunction to a client. The image is controlled by the client and offers him a safe place of return, that is, if unwanted associations or feelings arise, the clients bring their focus back onto the image. The image also confines the exploration to a particular area or function of the body and this ensures the exploration is not too open or unsafe. At least, these are just my reflections.

Through Shona's Ideokinesis experience, I could see the potential progression from concrete body level work, taking it to an expansion of a client's expressive range and then further to an emotional level into the dance therapy realm.

Of course, the way the work is used always depends on the therapeutic contract, an area that Susan Maling discussed. When clients are asked to move or dance, there is the potential for insight or understanding. It is the contract that determines what level you work at and it is important to be mindful of that when conducting sessions.