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# ELEMENTS OF BODY AND MOVEMENT EDUCATION

in working with groups and in conducting training

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# WHAT ARE BODYWORK AND SOMATIC PRACTICES?

In working with the body and in all somatic practices, the practitioners work on the basis of **a movement that is a response to external and internal stimuli**. It follows the same paths in the brain as emotions, so through movement, you can influence them and the perception of reality, yourself and other people. The movement of the body reflects the movement of our mind. The quality of body movement at any given moment manifests the mind's expression.

**Through movement, we can observe how the mind expresses and manifests through the body and influences the change of the mind-body relationship** (Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Body-Mind Centering<sup>®1</sup>).

To put it simply: the brain and the body are the ingredients of the same soup that enables the mind to arise (Antonio Damasio, *The Strange Order of Things. Life, Feelings, and the Making of Cultures*<sup>2</sup>).

**People contact each other through the body. Without contact with yourself, it is impossible to connect with other people and the outside world. It takes place through the body because this is where we live and experience the reality that surrounds us.**

Due to the body active role it can be seen as a *cognitive organ* that gives meaning to the world (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*). From birth, a child tunes himself to his caregivers through a non-verbal contact: at the level of the body (*soma*), and on this basis learns other behaviour and develops knowledge about the world.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bodymindcentering.com/>

<sup>2</sup> You can watch conversation with Antonio Damasio about his book: <https://youtu.be/ONByvKuMa4w>

**In the somatic approach, man is unity on the body-emotions-thoughts line.**

People often go through and remember movement experiences better than verbal ones. Movement engages us and arouses our curiosity, and the brain is built to learn, give meaning and make sense of individual actions. A movement is a form in which a person can express and confirm a sense of self within a kinesthetic reality.

**Working with the body stimulates the search for the optimal state of the body and spirit, increases its flexibility, deepens awareness and being "here and now".** Regardless of age, sensorimotor activities form new connections in the brain. This indicates that movement should not only support the development of children and adolescents (including rhythmic, physical education), but it should also be present in adult education in various ways (David A. Kolb's *Experiential Learning Model*<sup>3</sup>).

**What happens in trainings and workshops that use bodywork, movement and dance can be divided into the following phases:**

- ▶ **EXPERIMENTING WITH THE BODY AND WATCHING WHAT HAPPENS**
- ▶ **REFLECTING ON THE PROCESS RESULTING FROM MOVEMENT AND BODY SIGNALS**
- ▶ **DRAWING CONCLUSIONS FROM OBSERVATIONS**

Participants of trainings and workshops based on working with the body draw their attention to the body's signals and their embodied self-awareness. It provides material on which they reflect individually and exchange with others. Things that initially seem unrelated can eventually give participants more insight into the topic they are dealing with.

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<sup>3</sup> What Is Experiential Learning? - <https://youtu.be/0TeaFPSQsMY>

**Participants learn through activities that use and pay close attention to the body and its movement.** In the book *Your body knows the answer*, Martin Siems writes about the subconsciousness manifested in the body, in which the directions of activities and life choices are determined earlier than the person is aware of it. Through contact with the body and the use of somatic techniques, access to subconscious decisions and hidden resources of the creative part of the mind is made clear. Therefore one can observe the developing trend of embodiment learning, described as an alternative to education typically focused on learning only through mental activities.

**Embodiment learning<sup>4</sup> is a field that shows the benefits of learning by working with the body. By observing gestures, movements, and feeling what is happening in the body at different levels, one can get information inaccessible to the mind. Our stories are recorded in the body long before we realize their existence and meaning.**

This way of learning is based on the theory of **embodied cognition**<sup>5</sup>, which indicates the importance of aspects of the human body that play a significant role in cognitive processing. The aspects of the body are both the perceptual system, interaction with the environment, and assumptions about the world. This theory challenges other theories such as cognitivism and Cartesian dualism.

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<sup>4</sup> An introduction to embodied learning techniques: <https://blog.sanako.com/an-introduction-to-embodied-learning-techniques>

<sup>5</sup> A Brief Guide to Embodied Cognition: Why You Are Not Your Brain: <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/guest-blog/a-brief-guide-to-embodied-cognition-why-you-are-not-your-brain/>

# Examples of movement and dance methods used in working with groups

## ▶ DANCE MOVEMENT THERAPY (DMT)

**DMT is based on the use of movement to increase the physical, mental and spiritual integration of a person.** DMT therapists believe that the body-psyche relationship is mutual - not only does the psyche affect the body, but also the experiences of the body impact the psyche. DMT goal is getting to know yourself, your emotions and improving communication with other people.

## ▶ ART LIFE PROCESS ® ANNY HALPRIN

The body is at the centre of this method's comprehensive creative experience process. **The basis is deepening the bodily feeling capacity by stimulating and sensitizing the senses.** As a result, it becomes possible to access the world of inner images that manifest themselves in a spontaneously created drawing or painting. The therapeutic path leads from feeling to image, then from image to dance - to return from dance to image again. The method is based on visualization, creative process, Gestalt therapy and dance. It is used in pedagogy, therapy and art.

## ▶ LIVING DANCE FORM (LDF)

**LDF develops self-awareness and body awareness through spontaneous dance and movement.** It is based on the assumption that there is a source of energy, creativity, joy and inner knowledge in every human being. LDF is based on movement with attention and meditation and allows the participants to take up challenges to an authentic, joyful and harmonious life.

## ▶ LABAN BARTENIEFF MOVEMENT SYSTEM

A system based on the assumption that the way a person moves reflects and influences the way she/he lives her/his life. In this method, movement and body language are observed, which is of great use in therapeutic work. Rudolf Laban was looking for the

source of movement - psychophysical factors causing movement. This resulted in the emergence of the concept of motor qualities, which means internal impulses that cause specific movement.

**In Laban's method, categories such as space, weight, time, flow are respectively related to thinking, sensing, intuition and feeling.**

The analysis and description of the movement related to these aspects can help to find hypotheses about how a person functions in her/his inner world and in relationships with others.

## **BENEFITS OF INCORPORATING BODYWORK AND SOMATIC PRACTICES' ELEMENTS INTO TRAINING**

The growing number of researchers and practitioners indicates faster and more effective learning "through the body". More and more trainers, coaches and therapists use bodywork as a form that accelerates the process of change.

By training, we inspire participants to change and help them acquire the skills necessary to implement it. Assuming that movement increases the integration between the left and right hemispheres and harmonizes the connections between the head and the rest of the body, it is worth experimenting with bodywork and somatic practices.

### **General goals of bodywork and somatic practices:**

- ▶ supporting and developing the connection between the body, emotions and mind,
- ▶ better use of brain resources,
- ▶ expanding awareness and self-awareness,
- ▶ building non-verbal contact with oneself and with the group,
- ▶ launching the creative process,
- ▶ expressing mental states that are difficult to express in words,
- ▶ developing the ability to observe other people,
- ▶ improving the functioning of memory processes and sensors,

- ▶ help in controlling well-being and emotions in stressful situations,
- ▶ improving the quality of life and improving motor skills,
- ▶ increasing the physiological and emotional balance,
- ▶ increasing the awareness of a person body and movement,
- ▶ psychophysical regeneration,
- ▶ becoming aware of a person body posture that represents emotions,
- ▶ increasing the learning potential,
- ▶ increasing the ability to adapt to change.

It is important that working with the body supports the training or workshop learning process. Goal setting is the essence of any movement intervention, and it must be tailored to the specific needs of training. Different physical activities will be planned to work on assertiveness, firmness, self-confidence, and perseverance or emotional control. Other exercises will be proposed to a group whose participants will declare discipline and self-control, and others to people who have difficulty with concentration.

Particular qualities of movement are related to specific areas, such as: making decisions, concentration, exerting influence, or organizing life energy. Focusing on them can support the development process and strive to achieve training goals.

Training tasks or individual exercises can be built around, e.g. awareness, sensitivity or empathy. As trainers, we focus on describing what we see and not on the interpretation of movement. We ask the participants to do the same, which means witnessing other people's movements. The action here is similar to verbal communication: we hear, reflect, and tune in. The techniques that are often used include reflection, tuning and rhythm.

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