

## Moving, relaxing & reflecting: Somatic Movement Dance Education by Amanda Williamson

### **What is Somatic Movement Dance Education?**

Somatic Movement Dance Education in community contexts (SMDE) is a new field beginning to emerge internationally, and is growing in importance because it helps people to feel better about their body. Somatic Movement Dance Education tends to mean the study of the moving body through the development of kinaesthetic intelligence and anatomical awareness. Using gentle improvisational movement processes 'somatic movement education' is an excellent way to unwind, relax and reflect. It is a spacious practice designed to support people in cultivating a "deeper sense" of self. The profession utilizes experiential anatomical educative processes and multi-mode art modalities: drawing, painting, poetry, writing, talking, dancing & moving. Sensing, perceiving and reflecting through movement in order to gain a deeper understanding of the body, and how we feel in the world is central to the profession.

Somatic Movement Dance education helps people to explore their body through movement, and how art and movement can help reflect on life, and in turn support people in finding more direction.

Somatic Movement Education is an inclusive inter-age practice based on finding an easeful sense of body-health through relaxation and self-care. Further to this, the discipline explores social interaction, social consciousness and models of positive interaction. The following are key areas of study pertaining to profession at large:

### **Wider Key philosophical and Educational standpoints:**

Key philosophical standpoints such as self-awareness, self-knowledge and self-education inform praxis. The subject discipline is founded on the belief that we have the capacity and personal agency to direct and re-direct our lives through gentle self-reflexive movement processes, becoming active agents in our experience, sensually alive and co-actively engaged with our world.

Somatic Movement Dance Education tends to mean the study of the moving body through the development of kinaesthetic intelligence and anatomical awareness. Using gentle improvisational movement processes 'somatic movement education' is an excellent way to connection, re-vision and reflect. It is a spacious practice designed to support people in cultivating a "deeper sense" of self. The profession utilizes experiential anatomical educative processes and multi-mode art modalities: drawing, painting, poetry, writing, talking, dancing & moving. Sensing, perceiving and reflecting through movement in order to gain a deeper understanding of the body, and how we feel in the world is central to the profession.

The professional field is premised on conscious awareness of the vitality and movement within the body, self-awareness and self-education. Somatic Movement Dance education helps us to explore the body through movement, and how depth-connection in movement can help us reflect on life, and in turn support us in finding more direction.

Somatic Movement Education is an inclusive inter-age practice based on finding an easeful sense of body-health, and a deeper sense of self. Further to this, the discipline explores models of self-reflexive social interaction, socio-cultural awareness and models of positive interaction. The following are key areas of study pertaining to the field at large:

#### Experiential anatomy

Moment-by-moment depth-connection to the body through movement and anatomical awareness

Deep relaxation fostered through an awareness of the nervous system and meditative movement modalities

Practices of Self-care (looking after ourselves and valuing ourselves)

Personal and social change fostered through "models of dance and human companionship"

Moving from the sensory-imaginal

Improvisations sourced through anatomical investigations

Community practices, which explore connection and support through dance as a metaphor for understanding our interdependence

Gaining a deeper sense of self and more confidence through connection to others and through "models of positive interaction"

Poetic, symbolic, metaphoric and various art modalities, which deepen reflection, supporting people in re-visioning their lives with more direction and clarity

Inter-age and inclusive models of dance-health

The study of sacred dance, the soma and contemporary spirituality in movement

The discipline is largely based on:

Self-education  
Self-awareness  
Self-care  
Self-reflection  
Active participation in your own learning  
Making positive meaning and enhancing life  
Vitality and positive relationship with the body

### **Models of Support and Connection:**

Somatic Movement Dance Educators are trained in models of connectivity and support. Often clients come to sessions because they feel alone, fatigued, isolated, and alienated—usually people feel something is missing in their lives—a sense of joy or vitality has disappeared from their lived experience, and there is a need to be met and heard without judgement. Clients often articulate an uncomfortable feeling of ‘estrangement’, sensing their body needs some attention and care. The educators’ job is to help people feel more comfortable within their body and to release tension and neuromuscular patterns caused by stress or lack of movement.

### **Key skills and qualities required to work within the profession:**

The ability to move/dance with high degrees of kinaesthetic awareness  
The ability to work with human qualities such as companionship, gentleness, heart, vitality, empathy, and compassion  
A curiosity about movement and how movement reflects our lives  
An interest in poetry, metaphor and literature  
Social awareness and an interest in the formation of community using dance as an integrative tool

The above subtle but essential qualities are embedded within somatic movement exercises. As such, these qualities are key skills required to work within contemporary practice and play an integral part in the training of community practitioners. Qualities such as gentleness and companionship are cultivated in order to explore the health benefits of embodied personal and transpersonal experiential support.

### **What you need to Train:**

Usually a BA (Hons) Degree in dance, or a cognate discipline in the humanities or the social sciences, such as art, literature, sport, sociology or education.

A very good embodied understanding of kinaesthesia and kinaesthetic awareness is essential.

An interest in compassion and social consciousness, and a curiosity about how art and dance reflects life and can help people find more direction in their lives.

### **The General Field**

Connection to the body, support within the body, and supportive communications between bodies are definable aspects shaping the field. As such, practices are shaped by models of self-support (how we support our aloneness, finding enough support within our own body) and depth-connection with others (how we stay present, spacious, curious, right and alive; fostering positive connections). Connectivity is fostered through experiential processes, which contact a deeper sense of vitality, usually located within the body’s moving physiology. Community and client practices are part of a wider supportive and connective paradigm, a body of knowledge advocating the healthy benefits of connection and support. This body of knowledge straddles both performance and community work. Finding support in the moving body is a basic premise and discerning feature of Somatic Movement Dance Education, and there is a growing body of international knowledge exploring the positive effects of connection and bodily support.

### **Career opportunities:**

Most Somatic Movement Dance specialists are self-employed offering specialized workshops to particular client groups. Many practitioners work free-lance within the community, offering dance through somatic movement awareness, as a model for social and personal change. Sometimes practitioners work “on-other creativity through anatomical awareness

and the imagination. The application of Somatic Movement Dance Education is currently being integrated into educational programmes and mainstream dance curricular.

Dance and relaxation is becoming increasingly important and is used in retreat centres, offering deep relaxation and moving-spaces where people can reflect and make changes in their lives. In order to work in this field you need high levels of ingenuity, creativity and entrepreneurial skills. Often Somatic Dance Practitioners run their own programmes of study in order to support somatic awareness among the general public. Some practitioners open their own centres dedicated to health and well-being within the community.

### **Where to Study?**

Many undergraduate dance degrees offer the study of the application of somatics to dance studies. Please see Coventry University, De Montfort University, The University of Central Lancashire, and John Moores University for good examples of dance curricular and somatic education.

There are two Master degree programmes in Somatic Movement Dance Education, one in New York and the other at The University of Central Lancashire. Please see below:

MA Dance & Somatic Well-Being: Connections to the Living Body  
A Masters Degree in Somatic Movement & Dance Education featuring  
Community & Client Based Practice  
An Approved Somatic Movement Training Program of:  
The International Somatic Movement Education Therapy Association  
(ISMETA)  
For MA Course Information:  
<http://www.ismeta.org/mads.html>

University of Central Lancashire  
School of Creative & Performing Arts  
Preston PR1 2HE UK  
Phone: 0044 (0)1772 201201 ext 5349  
Email: [acwilliamson@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:acwilliamson@uclan.ac.uk)

There are many other programmes approved by the International Somatic Movement Education and Therapy Association. Please follow these links for further information about courses and practitioners internationally.

### **Link Sites Key sites:**

<http://www.mirandatufnell.co.uk/>  
<http://www.movingoncenter.org/>  
<http://www.ismeta.org/about.html>  
<http://www.movingbodyresources.com/>

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Visit 'The International Somatic Movement Education Therapy Association'

MA Course Information

UK: <http://www.ismeta.org/mads.html>

USA: [http://www.ismeta.org/CON\\_LIV\\_BODY.html](http://www.ismeta.org/CON_LIV_BODY.html)