

Original Research

Feldenkrais Method® and independent dance practice: Cultivating personal presence and responsiveness in a mutually shared creative practice

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Abstract

This article relates how the personal, professional, and creative concerns of an independent dance artist are tended to through Feldenkrais Method® practice. Through a series of case studies, told both from the perspective the dance artist and the Feldenkrais Method teacher, aspirations, sensibilities and processes shared by both artist and teacher are highlighted.

Keywords

Feldenkrais Method, contemporary dance, choreographic research, intention, awareness

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‘To me, teaching which is not personal is not teaching.’ (Feldenkrais 1980).

‘Our internal processes, provoked by present external influences or by ... previous experiences of the outside world, change our intentions to act as well as the way we act. You are as good as you wish; you are certainly more creative in imagining alternatives than you know.’ (Feldenkrais 1984).

The Feldenkrais Method is an expression of the founder’s boundless wonder about, and investigations into, what it is to live humanly. In close parallel, each independent dance artist’s creative work is a unique, creative expression of their personal investigations. The kind of somatic inquiry inherent in Feldenkrais Method practice offers dance artists a set of investigative processes that are closely akin to nature of their work. This is an account of an independent dance artist’s personal engagement with Feldenkrais practice over a series of sessions spanning six months. It is related through the dance artist’s (RN) first-hand narration of the sessions, and from the Feldenkrais Method teacher’s (ZK) point of view.

Situating RN’s Feldenkrais sessions within a culture of dance practice

Australia has many cultures of dance practice. RN’s work as an independent dance artist resonates with a community of practice established at Omeo Dance Studio (Omeo) – a culture in which critical movement inquiry and choreographic research was the central focus. The following overview of the nature of dance practice at Omeo Dance Studio situates RN’s engagement with Feldenkrais practice within a broader context. In doing so it offers insights into what the Feldenkrais approach to somatic inquiry afforded her as a person and independent

dancer/choreographer.

Established by dancer/choreographer Rosalind Crisp, the primary focus of Omeo Dance Studio (1996-2006) was on supporting investigative dance practices in response to the philosophy, structures, patterns, behaviours and complexity of the local independent dance sector in Sydney. Omeo's identity was strongly aligned with Crisp's dance practice, and also with the community of like-minded dance artists and their associates who made and showed work there.

Having access to a studio space provided Crisp with the right conditions for developing her work, giving her time and space necessary for choreographic practice and for intensifying inquiry into movement vocabulary:

My inquiry into dance is addressed through the body, through my body and through the bodies of the dancers who collaborate with me. We are engaged in a corporeal practice of using multiple sources interchangeably to propose an unstable body, one that is continuously reforming and deforming, without resolution. (cited in Long 2010: 120).

This concern with the unknown and unstable body required an investment over time. This was only possible due to Crisp's commitment to an ongoing practice and ongoing access to space and place without the constant demand of public presentation.

When talking with independent dance artists there are two aspects that continually arise in the articulation of what a 'practice' is. One is the regularity of being in the studio, be it everyday or once a week. The relationship of a dancing body with space is fundamental to the dance practitioner's existence and a primary constituent of their craft. Second is that the process is not necessarily product orientated. As with RN, a number of artists are interested in finding ways to generate and support a dance practice that is much less about making shows than about learning something new. They privilege notions of playing as a way of learning and deepening understanding of one's own body, quite apart from processes of production.

In an attempt to define their practice, dancers often refer to what it is not—it's not training; it's not rehearsing; it's not something that can be defined as a product. They frequently talk about practice as work—with the body and of the body; work, whose purpose is to delve into the body; to 'go back down into the body and keep it in the body' (Saunders cited in Long 2010: 124). Congruently, references to getting in touch with the body, listening to and seeing how the body feels, lead to images of clearing and cleaning the body not only in order to be ready to practice but also as an essential part of the practice itself. These definitions of personal practice resonate with the descriptions of RN's Feldenkrais sessions working with ZK and reveal the mutually beneficial dialogue of their shared practice.

Omeo was also a place from which friendships and artists' networks could grow through a sharing of practice. To maintain an evolving practice, artists work in sufficiently close proximity to one another, sharing common resources, engaging in mutual co-operation and easy

exchange of ideas—their bodies moving, sweating, talking, looking, laughing and resting—always growing, changing and rearranging. Where coherence of a community and a practice is measured through sporadic transformative changes, meaningful communication and effective relationships between individuals and their environment are paramount.

RN and ZK's shared practice has a quietly confident distillation and mindfulness in the specific choices each makes in the moment. There is an easy balance between somatic and verbal engagement between RN and ZK, as well as an implied understanding of the need to discover strategies for negotiating tension and challenges through accumulating knowledge of both bodies.

The Feldenkrais sessions

Session 1

RN: It is our first meeting. I describe in detail my work and most recent creative processes. I am interested in the progression from a cognitive act (imagining, reading, conceptualising) to an embodied act (moving, practicing), and especially want to address my difficulty in bridging the gap between thinking about and doing. Zoran notes I gesture to my head when talking about thinking and to my gut when talking about doing. I also mention sensations of tightness and pain in my right shoulder, aches in my right knee, feeling powerful through my right side but less so through my left. Many of these are imbalances I associate with an injury and the subsequent surgical reconstruction of my left anterior cruciate ligament in 2010.

Zoran invites me to stand, look out the window, and transfer my weight from one leg to the other. As I focus on the task my consciousness of being watched fades. I can sense my certainty over the right leg, and notice that I keep varying how I bring my weight over the left. Zoran confirms this, and adds his observation – the distance between my right shoulder and hip remains relatively constant, irrespective of which leg I stand over. This is unlike the left side of my torso, which freely changes in length with each weight shift. We talk about this and agree to explore how the right hip and shoulder relate to one another.

I lie on my back and Zoran begins investigating movements of my left arm and scapula. As I attend, Rosalind Crisp's words, 'Doing the work of letting go' come to mind. I feel small glitches and experience limitations. Zoran says he is feeling for the 'gliding' action of my scapula. This simple adverb triggers a textural idea that connects clearly to my movement memory. I feel a noticeable shift in the ease with which my left arm and shoulder move in relation to their surrounding parts.

Working now with my right arm, the shoulder feels denser, thicker. It is difficult to distinguish the exact location and direction of movements. Zoran touches the lower corner of the right scapula and starts initiating arm movements from there. I am unaccustomed to this and become aware

that I cannot respond with my automatic arm-shoulder-torso movement patterns. I guess confusion is a good space for generating new, functional connections. Being in unknown territory expands my awareness enabling other, less tracked, paths to emerge.

On the right side it seems we are undoing and creating options, whereas on the left we are finding not yet established connections. Towards the end of the session we discuss how each side (or 'part') has knowledge to offer the other.

ZK: Feldenkrais practice is personal. Enabling Rhiannon to satisfy her intentions is foremost in my mind, and this involves tending to her means of manifesting intentions in the world – her animation as an agentive being. I attend closely to Rhiannon as she speaks, attuning myself to her words and vocal tones; her meaningful expressions and gestures; the way she moves and shapes herself. As Rhiannon walks to the window I wonder how she will interpret the intent. I watch empathically, openly accepting what is offered. From the background of my bodily knowledge a perception emerges. A recurring pattern of movement weaves through Rhiannon's many enactments, but she is not aware of it.

I tailor the session to foster Rhiannon's awareness of herself. She is more articulate through the left side of her torso, so we begin there. Through touch she is invited to feel her body. As I calmly, slowly move her she is at leisure to sense the quantitative and qualitative aspects of her motion. Non-vocally I propose, I inquire, I acknowledge, all so that Rhiannon may experience and know. We do many movements for perceptual contrast, each variation adding another impression like daubs of paint in a pointillist painting. To promote conscious discernment we proceed at a pace that Rhiannon can effortlessly manage. Intermittently, I vocalise my thoughts and intentions, and we share what each is sensing. The inquiry expands matching Rhiannon's growing attunement to herself and what she feels is possible moment by moment.

Session 2

RN: Zoran asks, "Do you trust your left leg?" To explore this question we focus on my left side, attending to the left foot, it's relation to the floor, and how it's movements translate through my body.

I lie prone on the floor. The left knee is bent and the lower leg points to the ceiling. Zoran supports my ankle and rests a flat, light, timber board on the sole of the foot, creating what he calls an 'artificial floor' for it. Suspended in the air my foot is liberated from it's usual, gravity laden, mode of contacting the floor. I notice it is very sensitive in this orientation.

We begin with small movements, forwards, backwards, then side-to-side. I aim to keep the board parallel to the floor. To maintain the foot's contact with the board my ankle has to be articulate. The outer side of the ankle easily lengthens as it is taken sideways, away from the

centerline. This feels very familiar. Other directions feel less natural but this changes gradually over time and the ankle moves more easily.

We progress to circular movements. As these increase in size I can sense the involvement of my knee, thigh and hip. Circling the leg away from the centerline is restricted and triggers a feeling of fear. I remember my knee injury. It is the very motion I trained out of my body to avoid aggravating my once torn meniscus. I feel the muscles around the front of my hip grab. The thought of letting the leg go, to swing through its full range of motion, feels frightening. It is interesting that these protective pathways still exist even though the leg is not bearing my body weight, and the meniscal tear is long since repaired. I guess I don't yet trust this leg. However, in these circumstances I feel like I can begin to.

I am interested in the way the sense of ease in my ankle is connected to feelings of length and openness in the front of my working hip. I am left thinking about the pathways that we train out of our practice in dancing and injury rehabilitation processes. The mandate of always tracking my knees over my toes comes to mind and I wonder about how this creates limitations and perceived danger-zones in our body.

ZK: Between sessions I reflect on our session and think about how we might proceed. Reading about Rhiannon's experiences and perceptions greatly aids this process.

The situation I create for Rhiannon is designed to promote her re-experiencing ways of moving that are within her capacity but that have been inhibited – in her case through injury, then feelings of uncertainty and subsequent physical retraining. Lying down she is relieved of having to continuously mobilise herself to remain upright in standing. She is also relieved of the unrelenting intrusion of body sensations associated with her current way of standing – sensations that would prompt her to re-instate ways of holding and moving herself that feel safe and correct through familiarity. It is mistaken to think she can override somatic feelings deeply associated with the physiology of being unsafe.

Willfulness and strident, determined physical exercise only serve to veil such feelings. I do not expect Rhiannon to relinquish what she does until she feels it is safe and appropriate to do so. The processes I use enable her to monitor and consciously register when such conditions arise – and at the moment they do she immediately becomes open to new propositions and possibilities.

Session 3

RN: We agree to progress themes investigated in the previous session. Zoran asks about the daily exercises and stretches I do. One stretch in particular – lying with a foam block under my sacrum to lengthen my lower back – appears to spark in Zoran an idea of how we might proceed.

Lying on my back, with both legs bent, I fold the left leg toward my chest, then unfold it, returning the foot to the floor. We spend some time just exploring this apparently simple action. I notice that I automatically stabilise my pelvis to lift the leg, and realise that I am trying to create a stable, still base from which to isolate the movement of my left leg. Zoran speaks about alternative possibilities. After a bit of experimenting I let the pelvis move in response to the change in weight distribution. This way feels surprisingly gentle and efficient. I allow the lower back to curve away from the floor as I start to lift – something I have definitely trained away from doing – then let the back curve towards the floor as I bring my leg to my chest. We also experiment with folding my leg through different trajectories. I notice that directing the knee closer to the centerline helps the lifting action.

The activity develops to include unfolding my leg towards the ceiling, and then directing the knee towards the floor as I refold the leg. I automatically assume the pathway should occur in parallel, and this hinders bringing my knee to the floor. Zoran encourages me to experiment. I fold the leg at different angles seeking pathways where the joint glides most easily. I discover that the most appropriate angle is quite wider than I anticipated. The ease with which the hip folds makes it easy to support the weight of my leg, and I am now actually able to easily touch the floor with the knee.

Zoran places a weighty, hardcover book on the sole of my left foot, and I continue to fold and unfold the left leg, all the while balancing the book on my foot. We then switch the book to my left hand. I rest my left leg and do an analogous movement with my left arm. Zoran draws my attention to the spiral-like movement of my arm. I try to bring this idea of spiraling to the folding of the leg. It helps, but the action feels far less elegant.

With the book again on the sole of my foot, I use the unfolding action of the leg as an impetus for rolling onto my side. As I experiment, it becomes clear that, to mobilise my pelvis, I need to direct the limb differently than I anticipated. I experience terrible moments of 'stuck-ness' and 'need for force'. These are very recognizable sensations from dancing. It is very interesting to realize that a slight, perhaps 15-degree, change of angle allows me to accomplish my intent with no need for excessive force. Once coordinated, this action becomes a quite thrilling and satisfying ride.

We elaborate the action by including the arms. Co-coordinating the leg and arm to roll and return invites a more global kind of body listening. This is very much about timing. I realize I need to time the sequence of action so that the weight of each limb progressively assists the rolling motion. The delicateness and specificity of the mechanics excites me, in an almost choreographic way. It is a search for mobile equilibrium.

I enjoy our final conversation in which we talk about the physical 'work' that had been done. My hamstrings feel long from the repeated extensions, but at no point through the session had I thought about 'stretching my hamstrings'. My buttocks and abdomen feel strong and supportive.

All this without having had to concentrate on, or visualize, my muscles laboring as I would in a more gym-based, exercise context.

ZK: Rhiannon's positive experiences invite further exploration, and we do so in a different, yet related, context so that what she learns encompasses a wider range of body orientations and situations. One of Rhiannon's daily exercises stimulates my imagination. I wonder about the bodily implications of her preference for lying over a foam block, especially in regard to the particular leg-pelvic-torso relations it sets-up. My somatically-founded mental musings give rise to a way of continuing to promote Rhiannon's trust of her left leg.

As I watch Rhiannon repeatedly fold her legs in the same way, I acknowledge that her range of kinetic expression is constrained by her learned, automatic, ways of moving. To liberate herself Rhiannon must first become aware of habits of thought and action that ensnare her. So, the conditions we create in the session favour her attending to how she composes her actions. Rhiannon is encouraged to take her time, perceive and reflect on what she is doing, and to playfully explore alternative enactments. We find ways of moving that promote proprioceptive acuity so that she may make finer and finer perceptual distinctions. She is supported to increasingly cultivate her discernment when choosing ways of moving that suit both herself and the intention.

Placing a weighty book on her left foot affords Rhiannon the opportunity to once again engage with an 'artificial floor', but in a novel way. The book's weight pressing onto the sole enables her to more definitely sense the foot's position and movements. As she dynamically balances the book on her foot, every change in tilt of the book produces a different pattern of pressure on her sensate flesh, a different direction of pull against her skin caused by friction between the two surfaces. The task of balancing a book on her foot constrains the number of ways Rhiannon can fold and unfold her leg. This constraint narrows the range of exploration, increasing the probability that she will move in certain ways and not others. All together the situation is designed to precipitate the kinds of experiences that may enable Rhiannon to know alternative ways of being and moving that expressly better serve her conscious intentions.

Session 4

RN: In this session we work with a long roller. Lying on the roller – with legs bent, feet and hands on the floor – my aim is to rest calmly on the roller, allowing myself to roll off it rather than straining to stay on it.

We begin, alternately folding one leg toward the chest then the other. With every move I feel the roller shifting underneath me, informing me which way my weight is going. In this set up I discover my connection to the ground through the stabilizing leg. Lifting the left leg is quite easy. I am able to effectively make small adjustments to my relationship with the floor and roller.

Lifting the right leg I feel quite unstable. I feel that I am tensing a lot through my hip and torso and this creates more instability on the roller.

We explore pushing through the left foot as I lift the right leg, allowing the push to propagate through my body and roll me on the roller. This feels like a very practical solution. However, it also runs counter to my idea of hovering, or floating, on the roller and being able to isolate movement at my joints without the roller moving. We explore different levels of pressure, at different angles, through my left foot. I am surprised by the sensitivity of the surfaces of my foot, and by the repercussions I feel through my left hip and lower back. I experience that strange feeling of being confused within my own body, which I know is connected to a blocked area, or the action of holding.

When I try lifting the right leg again I am able to move more easily over the roller. I have a feeling of more detail and clarity through my left foot. I have more options. Allowing my weight to pour down through the stabilizing leg into the floor, and allowing the roller to move beneath me, gives me more ability to respond and counterbalance the shift in weight caused by lifting the leg.

The actions gradually become more complex involving the arms and legs, cross-laterally and homo-laterally. I enjoy 'giving in to' the movement of the roller. As I learn to coordinate my limbs and torso to counterbalance and suspend me, I come to trust that allowing myself to follow the roller's movement will not necessarily lead to falling off it.

I think back to something I was reading recently about the difference between 'stability' and 'rigidity' in relation to social constructs and governance. The metaphor seems relevant to what I am discovering here. Rigidity implies willful stillness, holding and resisting in the face of changing circumstances. The idea of stability acknowledges that there is implicit movement within a system. Balancing and counterbalancing on the roller to maintain my stability, I find the movement implicit within myself.

ZK: I set up a situation in which Rhiannon can directly experience how she mobilises herself – especially through her torso – to lose, regain and maintain her equilibrium. Lying on a long roller creates such a situation. The game-like nature of the task, and my manner of being with Rhiannon, are intended to evoke a sense of non-seriousness. Dealing with the roller's instability also requires engaged attentiveness, and for Rhiannon this brings to the fore her assumptions about the act of balancing. Her playfulness, curiosity and meta-cognitive realisations enable her to find, within the situation, a range of different solutions to the task.

The roller's physical properties aid the process. Its cylindrical shape offers a reduced scope of motion enabling me to produce a certain degree of situational constancy, which in turn reduces Rhiannon's anticipation. Its length allows Rhiannon to fully rest her head, torso and pelvis upon it. It's degree of firmness is such that it: easily molds to the contours of her body, affording her fuller support; deforms just enough to reduce instability because more of it's base-surface area rests on the floor; remains round enough to permit rolling motion. Finally, its small diameter

(12-15 cm) ensures that Rhiannon is close to the floor. Knowing that she can readily roll off the roller whenever she wishes, and without harm, affords her the feeling of being safe.

Session 5

RN: When working alone, assuming the dual role of choreographer and

dancer, I often find myself keeping my head quite upright and stiff as I move. It is as if my thinking, choreographic brain needs to be stationary whilst I direct the dancing body beneath. We agree to investigate the movement of the head in relation to the trunk.

Lying down on a large, thick, foam platform, my head supported on a separate cushion, I let my arms be moved. Zoran initiates these movements from my shoulders. The right side feels lighter to move and capable of more differentiated articulation. The left shoulder and ribcage feel heavier and tend to move more as a block. Zoran proceeds to tactually 'map' my scapula, clavicle, and ribcage. It is interesting to sense and imagine this part of myself. It is not an area I have a clear anatomical image for, or very precise control over.

Zoran moves the left arm away from, and towards, my centerline, bringing my attention to the sequencing of the movement: the arm being pulled pulls the scapula/clavicle; the clavicle pulls the sternum, sternum moves the ribs, the ribs move the spine; and vice versa. We address more directly the action of the scapula/clavicle. Zoran suggests I think of my arm movements in connection with the movement of the 'small arm' of the clavicle. He speaks about how the ribs and torso are affected by clavicular movements. Gently pulling on each finger of my lengthened arm, he invites me to feel how these quite distal movements translate through to my ribs and torso.

I notice that my thoughts are darting around somewhat and ask, 'What should I be thinking about?' Zoran's reply leads me to conclude that I am to remain alert, and that thoughts related to the outside world will progressively fade as I engage more in what's happening in the session.

Supporting my head in his hands, we begin exploring small movements of my head. At times I feel the fuller support of two hands. At other times I feel only the contact of one hand behind my head, whilst the other references movements of the ribcage or sternum in relation to the head movements. This is quite intense work. The way I am lying on the foam platform, the way Zoran holds my head, and the kinds of movements we are doing, inhibits customary ways I engage the front surfaces of my body, particularly my neck. Remaining in a very open state, I soon realize that the familiar ways I coordinate myself to move my head actually hinder, rather than assist, the movements Zoran is proposing. Eventually I find a gentle, and what feels like quite lengthened, engagement through my waist that seems to support the action. Zoran notices the

change and acknowledges it in an encouraging way. We converse about my head movements having a follow-through effect to my pelvis.

I mention that I am becoming quite aware that my left lower back muscles are engaging. Zoran asks me to push and pull through my left heel. Initially the flow of motion catches in my lower back. We explore different angles and directions of motion of the leg until I feel the push-pull action echoes easily up through my spine to my head.

We return to working directly with the head. After a while Zoran asks me to place my hands, with fingers interlaced, behind my head and we continue. The way the movement translates through my ribs towards my pelvis becomes much clearer and enjoyable. I again have the sensation of the body muscularly 'working', but efficiently. This subtle tone and variety of movement in my torso feels quite delicious.

When I stand up my chest feels very open and spacious. Opening the front of the chest and arching the upper back feels quite indulgent, slightly 'ballet-esque', and is definitely something that I have not been allowing myself to enter into recently.

ZK: I know that Rhiannon is able bodied, even more so than non-dancers.

However, like all people, she tends to have particular ways of posturing and moving herself to enact her thinking. Unfortunately for Rhiannon the postures and movements she enacts in her role as choreographer constrain her movement as a dancer. The solution does not lie in physically correcting the postures and movements she uses in one role or the other. Rather, a solution lies in Rhiannon getting to know, intimately and in ever finer detail, how she enacts her behaviours so that she can knowingly transform between one role and the other.

In the session I explore a repertoire of movements that I anticipate will offer Rhiannon a different sense of how movements of her head can flow through her spine and rib cage to her pelvis and legs. The context I set up is designed to promote particular movements of the head, shoulders, rib cage and spine, and not favour those associated with the way Rhiannon usually uses herself to think when choreographing. Speaking evocatively, the movements we do involving the arms, shoulder girdle and chest are akin to clearing up traffic congestion at a busy intersection – namely the thoracic inlet where the cervical spine, first rib and shoulder girdle meet. Once the metaphorical traffic jam is cleared then movement can flow freely, as intended, through the body.

Session 6

RN: I tell Zoran about the contemporary dance classes I have been doing, and

that I am able to access ease in moving when I have time in class to practice being aware of myself. However, as the phrasings and ranges of movement get more extreme, my muscles start to grab. Yes, I have done lots of repetitions and am starting to feel tired, but I also feel like

something runs out in my attention, or patience for working efficiently. I do a sideways lunge and then a rebounding leg lift as an example of a movement in which I feel my power and stability run out. As I demonstrate, I notice myself clenching, particularly my back muscles. We discuss the psoas muscle and its role in the movement I demonstrated, especially how it connects the lower and upper body.

As I lie on my back, Zoran lifts my right leg slightly off the ground, and slowly carries it sideways, parallel to the floor, away from my left leg, until it is about 45-degrees out to the side. He seems surprised by how easily my leg moves. I am invited to imagine the right leg getting lighter. I turn this image of lightening the leg into an interesting exploration for myself. I have the sensation of distributing a light tone through large surfaces of my body, so as to not force one part or joint to carry the load of lifting the entire weight of my leg. I experiment for some time and notice different sequences of muscle activity as I steer towards a more global, lighter tone. I tell Zoran that I definitely feel my inner thigh working, and that this feels like a constructive place to work. Zoran adds that the psoas muscle is also working to lift my leg, and repositions my leg so that it lines up with the line of action of the psoas muscle. I attend to feeling how my leg lightens even more in this new relationship. Zoran then lowers my right leg to the floor and we pause for a moment.

Leaving my left leg lying as it is, I bend my right leg and stand the foot on the floor. From here I slide my left heel downwards. As the heel 'creeps' along the floor the leg first lengthens away from the hip, and then lifts in a quite turned out position. I feel my lower left ribs being drawn gently in the direction of the heel. Zoran uses his hands to encourage a gentle arching of the lower back, especially along the right hand side. The back muscles remain soft, inactive, despite the spine having arched. We try a few permutations of this action. It feels like a really subtle but strong work-out for my inner thigh, something I have, in the past, struggled to access without feeling like I am over using my lower back muscles or clenching my abdominal muscles.

We then change to the other side. As I slide the left heel along the floor I feel the leg lifts more lightly than the right. Perhaps this is because of the fewer repetitions we have done on this side. Or perhaps it is because usually my left hip feels less dense and 'cluttered'. As we progress we notice that lifting the leg in this way leads to a spiraling action in my spine, connecting with the ribs and opposite shoulder. It is quite exciting to reach this very global action and get a sense of the connectivity of lower and upper body, particularly right out to my 'limby' extremities.

As we are ending I comment jokingly that I feel like I've been 'good' at doing this lesson. Instead of being confronted with my blind spots, as I felt I had been somewhat in the previous session, it is nice to feel that my natural responses can open up new possibilities for movement, and that these responses signpost connections learned through our sessions together.

ZK: Rhiannon is a reflective, mindful, engaged, resilient learner. Her dance class stories attest to this. Even though she is not yet able to 'access ease of movement' throughout a dance class she is deliberately practicing the methods and ideas she is encountering in our sessions.

As I observe Rhiannon demonstrating a dance action, I wonder how she 'holds' her leg in relation to her pelvis and torso. Even though repetitions of an act are never identical, I know that the dis-satisfaction she feels is associated with the particular way she coordinates this specific act. To assist Rhiannon become aware of those particulars I craft this session around a specific Awareness Through Movement lesson in which leg-torso relationships are investigated in ways immediately relevant to Rhiannon's concerns.

Like two jamming jazz musicians we improvise around the kinetic melody inherent in the ATM. I extemporise using set phrases from the ATM in ways that fit with my perceptions of how Rhiannon is moving. Then she responds, first expressing her understanding of the kinetic theme, then elaborating upon it. As we play on, unexpected, nuanced phrasings arise. Rhiannon appears to relish the new sensations resounding through her body. These become a felt reference for alternate, more satisfying ways she can coordinate herself.

There is an art inherent in somatic inquiry. Practicing the art is not always easy, nor is it always pleasant. Calm, abiding, hopeful, resolve is called for at such times, in friendly alliance with an openness to review methods and try out new ones. A sense of wonder is the beating heart of the art. Through her sessions Rhiannon has come to know more about herself, the ways she manifests, and can manifest, the meaningful acts in her life. Her feelings of being 'good' at doing this are indeed well founded.

Postscript

RN: Reflecting on our sessions it occurs to me that each were, in themselves, very creative acts, akin to improvisational or choreographic processes in which the cultivation of personal presence and responsiveness is essential to the discovery of a logic for the material at hand. Each session was an open, responsive, mobile exchange. We were perpetually re-calibrating to incorporate, and respond to, the most recent shift of the other. Most importantly, every session involved trusting in intuition and the intelligence of an idea conceived of in the moment. Intuition and aliveness are key to my engagement with dance. Our sessions nurtured my ability to calmly and openly remain in the moment of sensation – moments of not exactly cognitively knowing what I am doing, where the process is going, or what it will come to be.

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Biographies

Rhiannon Newton, BA

Studied Dance at the West Australian Academy of Performing Arts, Edith Cowan University. She is an established independent contemporary dancer with a history of working in Europe, Israel and Australia. Her emerging choreographic practice is grounded in investigations of improvisation and the role of repetition in dance.

Julie-Anne Long, PhD

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