

The Educational Mission of Moving on Center: A Radical Curriculum

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(Excerpted from a Larger Document)

The curriculum at Moving On Center -- The School of Participatory Arts and Somatic Research is as radical as our desire to share these skills and ideas across class and racial boundaries and to learn from a rich multi-cultural interaction. The methods of teaching reflect our values wherever possible. The curriculum is organized around:

1. The power of dance/movement to address the systemic imbalance of human health in a culture of consumerism (e.g., bringing people into their experience in the present; gaining satisfaction through positive experiences and interactions with people and the arts vs. with things; countering technological bombardment.) Concrete knowledge about the body and the use of the body in daily life is taught. Other goals include increasing appreciation of other individuals and cultures, as well as bringing awareness to social concerns -- especially feminist issues -- dealing with pregnancy and choices about continuing or ending new life, issues of sexuality, new views of economics when devoted to dance/arts, concerns about the value of dance in our society, and in turn the way in which the body and related issues such as children and healthcare are bureaucratized. In dealing with these issues we agree with Maxine Greene -- if art emerges out of "dread" it leads more directly to developing new and better images of reality, and hence toward collectivity/unity. We teach this vs. "being a fashionable arts consumer." (Greene, 1996) and with Yolanda King - "keep the outrage but get rid of the rage." (King 1997) (see nonviolence below).
2. Somatic theory -- addresses the idea that each person has his or her own active intelligence. It is an approach to body-mind awareness that allows the emergence of each person's own sense of self and of what is right environmentally, often eliciting a desire for environmental and interpersonal change toward unity, and concern for the earth (see articles by Don Johnson, Tom Hanna in our reader). Basic universal spiritual values also may emerge. The practice of authentic movement, Body-Mind Centering and Vocal motion are among our primary in-roads to somatic discovery. Once people make personal somatic breakthroughs they often become more sensitive to large group issues. The awareness of self, given the right context and direction, provides inspiration to open to community level issues. The focus of our school is to identify what systemic imbalances are causing personal suffering and then to take action around them (e.g., physical organic imbalances often relate to nutritional deficiencies which in turn relate to larger issues of commercialism, agribusiness etc.).
3. Participatory arts -- aims to teach performers and audiences, movement therapists and clients to engage in the creative process actively, without hierarchy. Moving On Center perceives knowledge as power. We accept all applicants who are ready for an intensive community experience. Embodiment is also a tool of empowerment. We intend to share live art and somatic information experientially as inroads to guiding life choices. Participants are all equal, sharing responsibilities and ideas. No one person is given the limelight, countering the "stardom" atmosphere rampant in the arts. Our performances engage the audience; our healing sessions are a shared period of discovery between client and therapist. Everyone brings his or her own somatic intelligence to the exploration.
4. Improvisation as a life skill. Mary Catherine Bateson, daughter of Margaret Mead writes "Today the materials and skills from which a life is composed are no longer clear. It is no longer possible to follow the paths of previous generations. This is true for both men and women, but it is especially true for women, whose whole lives no longer need be dominated by the rhythms of procreation and the dependencies that these created, but who still must live with the discontinuities of female biology and still must balance conflicting demands. For many years I have been interested in the arts of improvisation, which involve recombining partly familiar materials in new ways, often in ways especially sensitive to context, interaction, and response." As we teach skills of improvisation we find we are helping men and women to be more fluent and at-ease in a culture of disruption; we are providing skills for leadership in the change process. Irmgard Bartenieff whose work we also teach saw movement as a way to adapt to and seeks adaptations of the environment (Bartenieff, 1980).
5. Addressing themes of cultural location; locating our cultural influences through our bodies; making physical statements consciously or unconsciously (e.g., performances, non-verbal communication etc.); serves as a way to uncover racism, conflicts based on mis-communications, and/or new sources of community.

6. Non-violence as a theme for approaching change is introduced as a key principle in our counseling training in HAKOMI body-centered psychotherapy. It is reinforced by classes in Authentic Movement and through group problem-solving using conflict resolution. As of yet civil disobedience has not been enacted by groups from our school however the notion of performance art as an act of civil disobedience is discussed.

We value connections and interaction with other groups and individuals in the development of our social change mission.

Training in somatic movement work has traditionally only been shared in privileged circles. MOC attempts to bring this work to a full range of people of all class, cultural, and racial backgrounds with the hope that each person will become a leader in sharing body-mind integration with ever widening circles of people. One specific intent is to guide youth and adults to reclaim their body wisdom in order to make healthy, creative, and enlivening choices. MOC scholarship recipients and other graduates aim to be sensitive to and highlight the relationship between somatic experience and social concerns, publicly through movement therapy, education, and art making.

These goals can begin to be observed in the following ways:

- The choice to be located at the Alice Arts Center in downtown Oakland is a critical piece in helping this come to fruition. The center is a community center for the arts managed by a team of African-American men and women. It houses dance, theatre and music groups of diverse ethnic and racial background. In our day-to-day sharing of space we are in constant dialogue regarding needs and differences that teach all involved about multi-cultural participation.
- The types of internships our students seek out and participate in range from work in hospices, AIDS clinics, theatres, children's museums, working with women with breast cancer, centers for children with disabilities etc. We have established the possibility of future internships in Somatics with Victims of Torture sponsored by CIIS.
- A community "bodywork clinic" offering free sessions to the local community at the Alice Arts Center.
- New allegiances/support: advisory council member -- Maxine Greene and work with Joi Gresham of Leslie College, The Dance and Culture Project.
- Moving on Center has developed two readers (a collection of articles) and a library with many unique resources addressing many of the above themes. These have been available to our students as well as other inquiring individuals.
- Through our Scholarship for Social Change we work to include more and more people of color and those people who are dedicated to sharing this work in underserved areas of the United States. Through our work exchange program students from diverse class backgrounds are able to participate both in workshops and the full-time program.