

### **Introduction**

Many conflicts begin with misunderstandings of body language, and escalate because there is limited modeling of conflict resolution. Body language is often misinterpreted due to personal biases, differences of perception, prejudicial responses, and cultural ignorance. It is helpful to de-escalate conflict by using a systematic observational process.

In this process one can:

1. Describe what is seen and perceived about the movement behavior, rather than just reacting from our interpretations and assumptions.
2. Use words to de-escalate physical stress
3. Be aware of body cues and respond sensitively to avoid escalation

In bringing movement experience to consciousness it is useful to 'name' the experience. However, language may not be neutral as it is embedded in cultural systems. Movement analysts have worked to find “neutral” language that is purely descriptive rather than infused with subjective opinion. The study of kinesics and non-verbal communication involves the systematic description of direct experience.

This involves digging deeper for solutions. Somatic disciplines are those that assume that the body holds information to be mined. Using LMA involves establishing a base of knowledge through movement experience. Non-verbal communication can be managed, and become subtle and sophisticated. In addition this helps us move from jumping to conclusions to recognizing our assumptions and choosing to do more fact gathering instead. Ideally it is never assumed that one’s interpretations of movement are accurate to the mover’s experience. Specificity of description can lead to greater questioning, enhancing the likelihood of bringing accurate understanding and conscious awareness in both the observer and the mover alike.

### **Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) and Conflict Resolution**

Educators and therapists can work with movement behavior as a source of conflict and resolution. Having descriptive, non-judgmental, language such as that developed by Rudolf Laban to describe “body language” experiences (Weitz, 1979) can assist the process of understanding of movement behavior.

One can turn to principles of LMA for assistance since Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) principles extend our capacity for the appreciation of others’ emotional, social and physical experience.

Basic premises of LMA:

- Human movement involves the body moving in space with personally motivated dynamic variation.
- All externally visible behavior has an internal counterpart and visa versa.

- All movement has a functional and expressive aspect.
- Every action is best repeated when recuperation is also part of the rhythm of the movement

Basic Observational questions include:

- What exactly am I seeing this person do?
- How does s/he use space?
- What body parts are active?
- How is the spine carried?
- What energy is visible in the movement (e.g., lethargic, excited, easy-going)?
- What exactly is the quality of the movement relative to focus, tension, force, and time?

In viewing movement with a desire to avoid as much bias as possible LMA questions to ask can include:

- How do I perceive that?
- Why do I think I am noticing this now?
- How does this movement relates to my strengths and weaknesses; my likes and dislikes?

Inner experience is also important in LMA viewing. We can also ask:

- What does the movement reveal about the intent of the mover?
- What are the inner feelings that are being expressed by the movement?
- What function does that non-verbal behavior serve?
- For instance, how does the nonverbal expression of our anger or despair serve us (or not) functionally?
- What sensitive questions may I ask appropriately in order to better understand the mover's motivations?
- How does this use of the body feel, physically and emotionally today to me the viewer? How do I imagine it feels for the mover? How can I check my observations?

In order to come to conclusions about what we see we often follow our assumptions. However assumptions can steer us in the wrong direction. Given this it is good to reflect using the above questions. It can also be helpful to draw on the bodies of knowledge that have been applied for many years in order to derive contextually specific meaning.

Some of the LMA-based systems of inquiry that have been developed to help in the process of deriving meaning are:

1. Action Profiling -- business and interaction styles
2. Judith Kestenberg's "Kestenberg Movement Profile" -- personality and developmental profile
3. Martha Davis' Movement Signature Analysis -- leadership styles
4. Warren Lamb's Movement Profile Analysis -- decision making styles
5. Marion North's Personality Assessment through Movement

One can also turn to a somatic approach to awareness using LMA by being sensitive to the effects of postural movement, gestures, and facial expression (inclusive of eye contact). In a case-by-case manner, one can strive to gather information for a richer contextual framework. To reiterate, specifics can be considered from a perspective that is diminished in prejudice by asking the questions based on observations described with “neutral” language.

While it is good to de-escalate conflict it also becomes important to work toward resolution and creative process that heighten a sense of a positive community. This step is the transformation of stressful conflict to peaceful action. Here again we can ask questions. ASK:

- What other movement expression might be recuperative?
- What supports trying that recuperation (or change)?
- Might this person be more responsive to subtle adaptations, or radical departures from the norm?
- Does the expression need to be intensified in order to communicate more clearly?
- Are there other aspects of the behavior that need to be brought out into the forefront more?

Conflict and violence often arise out of feelings of limitation. LMA is a great tool for expanding choices, through behavioral exploration and through creative problem-solving. Expanding choices can help to:

- Enhance behavioral options by expanding proprioceptive and kinesthetic awareness so that one can do a better reading of another’s non-verbal behavior
- Provide more options of how to respond to conflict
- Enliven perceptions of experience
- Practice improvisational adjustments (shape and effort flow as a baseline for full dynamic expression)
- Enough practice leads to easy access to embodied skills for violence prevention

Using these experiences adults and children alike can heighten their “emotional intelligence” (Goleman, 1995) quotient by engaging in sensitive and holistic learning inclusive of physical activity. Through movement practice, youth not only cognitively understand what moral decisions and social actions to take toward creating peace; they become practiced in engaging in these actions.

### **Educational Uses of Movement in Conflict Resolution and Violence Prevention Classes: Eddy’s Research**

Here are some examples of using movement and bodily awareness observed (Eddy, 1998) to support the learning and practice of the “CAPS” model of Conflict Resolution (used by Educators for Social Responsibility)

Cool down (take space – find own kinesphere, release tension)

Agree to solve the problem (bow, make gentle eye contact, hand shake)

Points of view /analyze the situation (listen with full bodied attention, watch and pay attention to body language, and reflect on those issues and feelings revealed through words or movement)

Solve the problem (physically brainstorm responses, cooperate on a dance or physical theater task, and negotiate using dialogue, drama, or real-life dilemmas from movement settings).

The above example is drawn from the dissertation research I completed at Teachers College, Columbia University. This research can be summarized as follows:

- In-depth case studies of six highly regarded physical activity based violence prevention programs around the United States.
- Qualitative Methods: Up to 60 hours at each site observing and conducting formal and informal interviews.
- Document Analysis: curricula, teacher notes, school and program philosophy
- Data Analysis: development of emergent categories, using constant comparison, as well as strategies of analysis from LMA

Early stages of research revealed a myriad of approaches to violence prevention. Typical curricula found to exist were conflict resolution; bullies, victims and bystanders; gun law education; anti-bias education; socio-emotional intelligence; and multi-cultural appreciation. The physical-activity based curricula were found to be unique curricula in that they also choose to relate these themes to youth's need and capacity for creative and active expression of their personal experiences. Sundry programs were located that included physical activity to address these needs. The spectrum of movement forms observed included Martial Arts, Sports Education and Coaching, Cooperative Games, Somatic Awareness, Physical Theater, and Dance. LMA observation supported data collection about the following features:

- Student Behavior
- Use of Space
- Use of Strength
- Teacher Behavior
- Teaching Ideas

Data Analysis occurred after the first round of site visits occurred and regularly thereafter. Coding categories were established both deductively from the literature search and inductively from the analysis process. All observational records and interview transcripts were coded using these categories. Re-organization of the coding categories continued throughout the data gathering process. The final coding categories were applied to the all sets of data in the final analysis. There was also the emergence of a specialized matrix for analysis of movement's role in violence prevention, the Eddy Matrix. The logic for conceiving of this matrix was based in Lamb's decision making model, steeped in LMA theory. As part of data analysis, LMA observational skills, LMA coding methods, and LMA theory resulted in developing a matrix for analysis of diverse violence prevention programs.

The findings were diverse. In brief:

- The Role of Dance and Physical Theater: Once created the specialized matrix that viewed violence prevention goals in relationship to the curricular potential of the physical activities employed was applied to each movement form.

- Pedagogical trends: teacher characteristics as well as teacher modeling through “key teaching tactics” is a critical feature in these effective programs
- Other emergent themes included: humor, holism, sensitivity to power dynamics, varied use of strength and other dynamics, and concern with spatial interactions (e.g., spatial awareness and standing upright).

### **Teacher Education based on Research**

One outcome of this research has been the teaching of a course based on these findings -- “Conflict Resolution, Violence Prevention, and Community Building through Movement and Dance. This course is offered within the Dance Education Laboratory (DEL) at the Harkness Center of the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y in NYC. DEL has provided an opportunity to teach from research findings. This pedagogical approach includes:

- Sharing what excellent programs and teachers were found to do
- Development of model lessons based on themes and strategies from the research and the current teachers original application
- Opportunity for students to experiment with learning processes in a laboratory setting
- Another goal is the development of a Teaching Manual on this subject

### **The Position of Dance and Drama in Violence Prevention: Emergent Themes**

Dance and drama were the arenas in which students were able to giving voice to “real issues.” These classes provide new perspectives on body image (countering violent aspects of the media). They incorporating somatic awareness - listening inside to one’s needs - and finding meaningful solutions to problems and may well contribute to enhancing socio-emotional intelligence. These movement-based classes provide opportunities for non-sexual touch as well as safe dialogue about sexuality. They engage youth through skill-building, cooperative problem solving, and the production of an art product. Dance and physical theater address spatial alertness and use of bodily strength on numerous levels.

### **Eddy’s Findings Regarding Effective Teaching Practices**

The teachers were unique but also capable of training other teachers to work effectively with children. Some of the important teacher characteristics included:

- At least 15 years of skill in teaching their movement component (often also trained in some drama, martial arts, somatic practices)
- Primarily women who choose to draw on their own history of abuse or oppression
- Had some minimal training in conflict resolution
- Active in devising physical activities to empower youth through expression

These teachers also held distinct views especially regarding the youth experiences of violence.

- Youth as Perpetrators of Violence as Myth
- Youth and “Inner/Bodily” Violence is Important
- Youth as Victims of Violence
- societal
- class, gender, racial
- intercultural

- education as assault on somatic experience (Alan Block, 1997)

An exciting pedagogical finding was to do with the behavior of teachers. Key teaching tactics were identified and evaluated for their repeated use (Eddy, 1998)

### **Applying Eddy's Findings to Other Laban Trained Teachers Work**

It has been useful to apply these findings to the work of other teachers. For the purposes of this paper, examples are given of the evaluation of other Laban-Trained teachers involved in violence prevention work.

For instance, Nancy Beardall, as a teacher, a mentor, a facilitator and a definer of new concepts within the violence prevention field was found to use the key teaching tactics repeatedly.

CMA, and Ph.D., Sharon Unrau's work ranked high as an effective teachers on Eddy's scale of teacher tactics as well. Unrau, CMA, Ph.D. is in charge of a Middle School Co-ed Dance Program in Columbus, Ohio. She is know for engaging the "Bad Boys" despite many limiting factors in the public school environment (e.g., sometimes teaching in the hall, low literacy rate amongst the students). She developed an "emergent curricula," also responding to the needs of the students. The following are three examples of some original units within her curricula.

#### Example #1: Unrau's Swan Lake Unit

Here she provides a cross-cultural push (awakening students to appreciate something that is usually repulsed -- ballet)

Her goals include students making decisions on their own -- taking initiative and responsibility

She looks to the content themes within Swan Lake as well to ask the questions:

Can You Relate?: Love/Betrayal/Deception/Fate/Forgiveness

Suicide as Only Option?

The result of these classes is that real talking occurs and becomes desired

#### Example #2: Unrau's Space Harmony and The Octahedron

Children as challenged to contending with Space by building life size octahedrons.

They Work Together (2 or 3 groups)

Transforming Competition and Resignation into Feelings of Achivement

Literacy through Action (Low level readers using diagrams, initiating research, reading Laban texts)

#### Example #3: Unrau's Hip-Hop Dance

Student Ownership/Taking Full Responsibility

Semester synthesis: Is what I am teaching working? (Are dance content and modelled teaching tactics being integrated.)

Selection of music: dealing with censorship and cooperative decision-making

Real life issues: being respectful, dealing with sexual issues (making new choices), cultural differences.

Inclusion (different kids fitting in: white/black; fat/skinny; male/female)

Within the course developed for the Dance Education Laboratory there is a review of educational possibilities inclusive of conflict resolution and community building through performance. Other goals are:

To provide educators with models of effective teaching strategies that incorporate active participation in violence prevention inclusive of full-bodied physical activity, creativity, and expansive dialogues.

Teachers are encouraged to consider a spectrum of physical activities that meet varying violence prevention goals (and invited to use Eddy's matrix). Through experiencing somatic lessons in a safe community of peers, teachers are better equipped to suit the skills and comfort zones of both students and administrators. The course also welcomes guest teachers and has learned from CMA, Ellen Goldman. Goldman's original research into what spatial interaction patterns affect interpersonal conflict adversely or productively is based in Laban's system of Space Harmony. She provides a practical guide for de-escalating conflict once the conflict building behaviors are identified (Goldman, 1998).

LMA-influenced Violence Prevention curricula have been created by CMAs:

- ❖ Nancy Beardall's health education curriculum for the Newton middle school system. This comprehensive curriculum has a scope and sequence that runs the gamut from stress reduction to awareness of bullying and enactive approaches to dealing with bullying, and on to gender abuse, stress reduction, drug awareness, and eating disorders. The children, as activists, are addressing these themes by writing school newspaper editions on the subject, engaging in safety practices during and between classes, and presenting peace-making ideas to the administration. The themes addressed emerged from Beardall's initial engagement with a large percentage of the school as their dance educator.
- ❖ Regina Miranda's Breaking Ground Project began in Brazil and now is offered in NYC. It seeks to address gender related bullying and harassment. It's involves CMA leadership.
- ❖ My own Peaceful Play Curriculum is designed for the K –5 school environment as a school-wide approach to peaceful recess programs. It involves working with the teachers and administrators to develop sophistication in their conflict resolution and mediation skill base. It also introduces teacher facilitated integrative arts and sports activities. Ideally a school also contracts to put a Peer Mediation program in place.

### **Conclusion: Restating the Need for Embodied Violence Prevention**

Society is demanding, alienating, challenging, and shifting. Violence is pervasive in our culture. Violence has physical components. People, in general, and children in particular, learn through doing (Bandura/Dewey/Piaget). Schools and after-school programs can be

advocates for bodily expression and in-depth self-awareness. Programs are infused with excitement when they include arts-based approaches to conflict resolution and violence prevention. Engaging students in an art-making process is one type of peace activism that sets a standard for cooperative engagement in the future.

Future Steps for furthering peace in our schools include:

- Find methods for teachers and students to access their own somatic intelligence in order to enhance Socio-Emotional Learning and make safe choices.
- Train educators across disciplines to include creative options and bodily experience in teaching.
- Include youth in identifying needs, developing curricular goals, and in training teachers.
- Continue research inclusive of qualitative, quantitative, & epidemiological paradigms.
- Provide avenues for teacher and student stress reduction and creative renewal

To do this LMA provides:

- ❖ A framework for becoming aware of the problem
- ❖ A lens to observe through and to achieve more objectivity
- ❖ Skills for conflict management and transformation
- ❖ A model for the development of highly specific assessment tools
- ❖ Many educational and somatic experiences that help creativity to blossom and balanced feelings emerge.

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