The Deeply Rooted Body

Using somatic, meditative, and writing practices in public schools as a way to engage the whole self.

Jennifer M. Eccher
Bard High School Early College – Cleveland

Dance is a beautiful and frightening art form to many. In my years as a teaching artist in an urban public high school, I have engaged with students from wildly different backgrounds and experiences with dance. The uncertainty of what we will be doing and how they will look doing it fills them with fear. Over the years, familiar phrases stand out to me: " I don't know how to dance," "I hate dancing," " I have two left feet." Many times, students make these comments prior to them even moving. Students' anxiety is a challenge I have encountered in all the years that I have taught.

I believe in creating a space that opens up the possibility for students to explore and make new connections with each other and with themselves, creatively. To not allow their own insecurities to hinder them from discovering these exchanges, to see, feel and live in their movement potential – a return to play. This creative playground has always been my objective in my classes, and yet there is structure. The pedagogical method in students achieving these goals lies within the writing, movement and meditative practices that are interwoven into the curriculum. These proprioceptive and metacognitive strategies that I have implemented in my classes have resulted in deeper cognitive connections and stronger student engagement.

I believe in building a community within my classroom where individuals can explore, experiment and make new discoveries of themselves through movement, meditation and writing. I find myself drawn to a phrase from bell hooks in *Teaching to Transgress:* "Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process." As a teacher of the performing arts, observing and moving among the students is an essential component to creating a learning environment that is holistic and engaging. While building a community within a classroom, the teacher is a fundamental part of this process. To come from a place of curiosity, compassion, generosity, and knowledge establishes a trust and openness for students to learn. As teachers we should always be striving to learn and understand more about our students and in that way we function as facilitators.

In my time as a teaching artist for Bard Early College, I have met students with anxiety disorders, obsessive compulsive disorders and traumas that impact their learning as scholars. Adolescence is a transformative time period for an individual, and at times it can be incredibly challenging. Panic attacks, meltdowns, and even rage that is induced by triggers brought on by social interactions, send students down a path of disconnection of their mind and body. These moments of disconnection can hinder the students' capacity to learn and feel whole. Breaking students out of these patterns can be achieved by understanding the workings of our nervous system, which is a central component that connects our mind and body.

Understanding these systems can give insight on how to redirect negative patterns that disrupt the conscious flow between the mind and body.

The Peripheral Nervous System (PNS) acts as a superhighway. Signals from the brain called neurotransmitters disperse through the PNS into your body. Messages from your body are sent through the PNS to your brain to process. There are two divisions within this system: the Somatic Nervous System and the Autonomic Nervous System. The somatic nervous system is a voluntary component of the PNS which makes you aware of the movement action occurring through your body. To put it in the perspective of a dancer, this occurs every time we begin class, process through a warm-up routine, and perform a choreographed piece in front of an audience. During a ballet class, when the student is performing a simple demi-plié combination, even if they are a novice to the work, the somatic nervous system is in action throughout the course of the exercise. With the aid of the instructor, the student is consciously aware within their body the tasks they need to do to achieve the proper way of executing the movement.

MOVEMENT PRACTICE

Reader participation is required

Please stand up from where you are sitting, and stretch your body to bring some awareness to your muscles and joints. The reason behind this request is you are about to perform a movement exercise used as one of the first warmups in ballet called *demi-plié*. Your somatic nervous system will be engaged while you are performing these tasks. Mainly due to the specific placement and organization, your body will be consciously performing. Feel free to put music on, preferably classical. The style of ballet generally uses classical music to give you a tempo.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

A ballet barre, but if you do not have one, the back of a chair or any stable structure like a desk or table will suffice. Place either your right or left hand on the structure. You will also need a notebook & pen.

LOWER REGION OF YOUR BODY

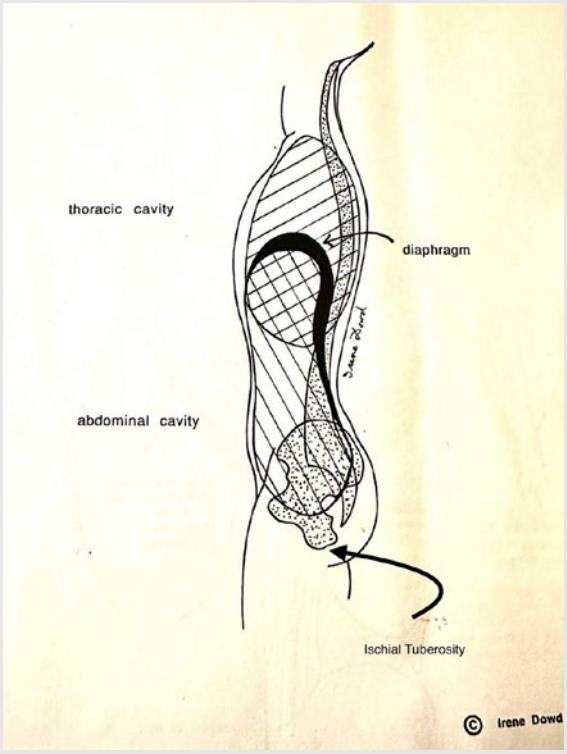
Step 1

Rotate your hips outward so the legs and knees are turned out, and feet are in a V-position, which is called *1st position* in ballet. (Please make sure the rotation is coming from your hips and not your knees.)

1A Mover showing hip rotation

1B Mover's first position turnout

Step 2 Bend your knees making sure each knee aligns over your toes, in particular your 1st and 2nd toe. While you are bending your knees, maintain alignment in your pelvic region by having your ischial tuberosity (sit bones) reaching straight down towards your heels.



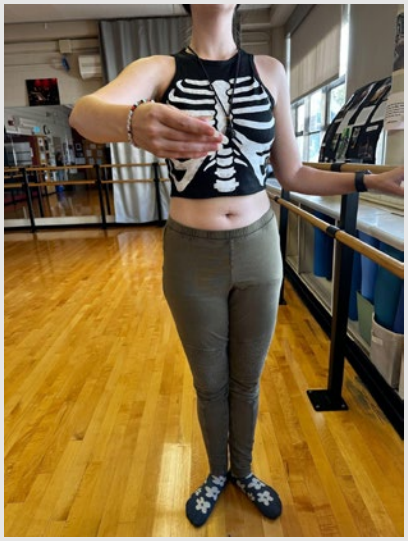
2A Diagram from Irene Dowd

2B Mover demonstrating pelvic alignment

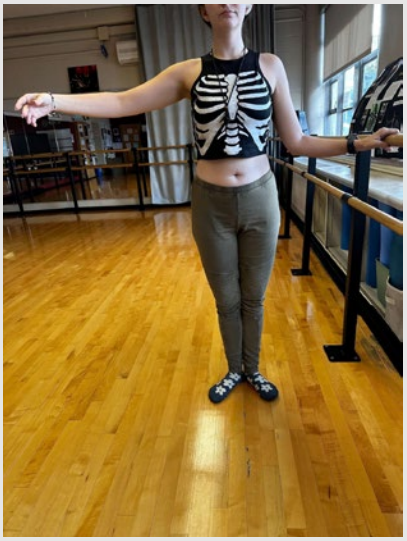
UPPER REGION OF YOUR BODY

Step 1 Your working arm (the one that is not holding onto the structured barre you are using) is working through a *port de bras* (carriage of the arms). Before you begin the demi-plié, your working arm will open up to *à la seconde* position. The arm will extend out to your side. For ballet, there is generally an acknowledgement of starting an exercise or combination by a simple gesture of the arm(s). There are 3 points of rotation within the arm to create the proper *seconde* position starting at the shoulder point. Your shoulder should be slightly rotated forward, elbow rotated inward, slightly bent, and the wrist rotated slightly inward. The hand continues to follow the direction of the arm with fingertips including the thumb softly extended. The elbow point is lower than the shoulder point, and the wrist point is lower than the elbow

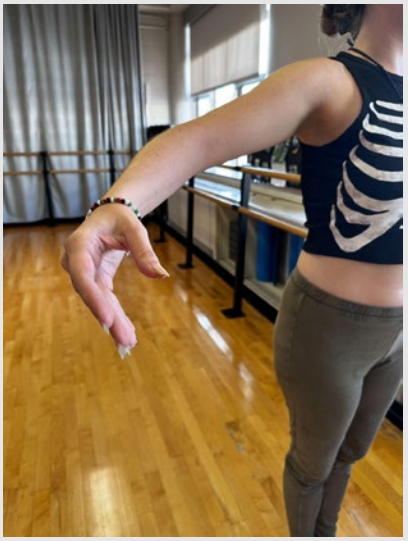
point. The goal is to create a ramp so that a drop of water can trickle down from your shoulder and past your elbow - wrist until it drops off your index finger.



3A Port de bras arm in 1st position



3B Arm moved into 2nd position

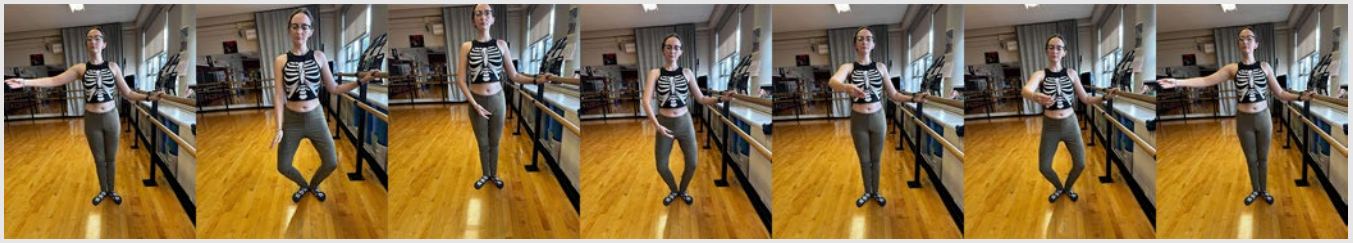


3A 2nd position curve

Step 2

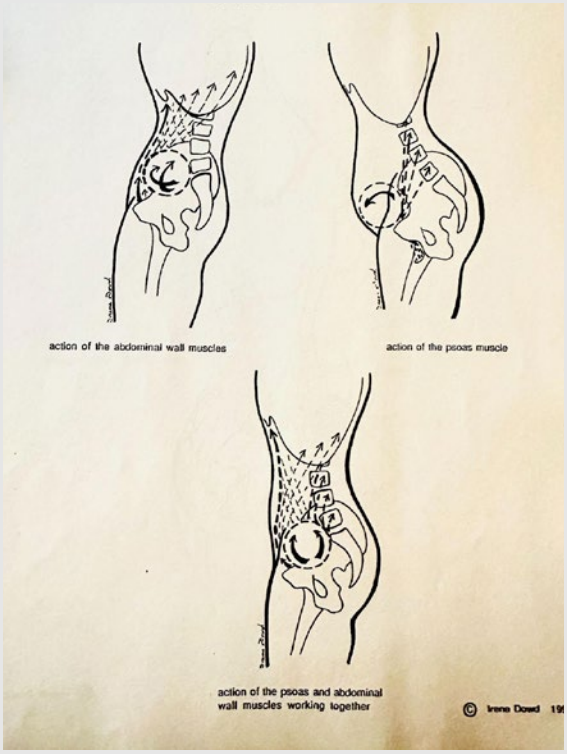
During the first demi-plié, the arm will lower to 5th position: low, maintaining the same structure from *seconde* but with the elbow bending a little more, as if you were holding a large ball. In the second demi-plié, the arm will rise up to 1st position, which is a bit lower from your chest area, and will maintain the same position as it was in 5th position. Again, holding a large ball. For the third demi-plié the arm opens back out to seconde position.

Repeat this sequence 2 times.

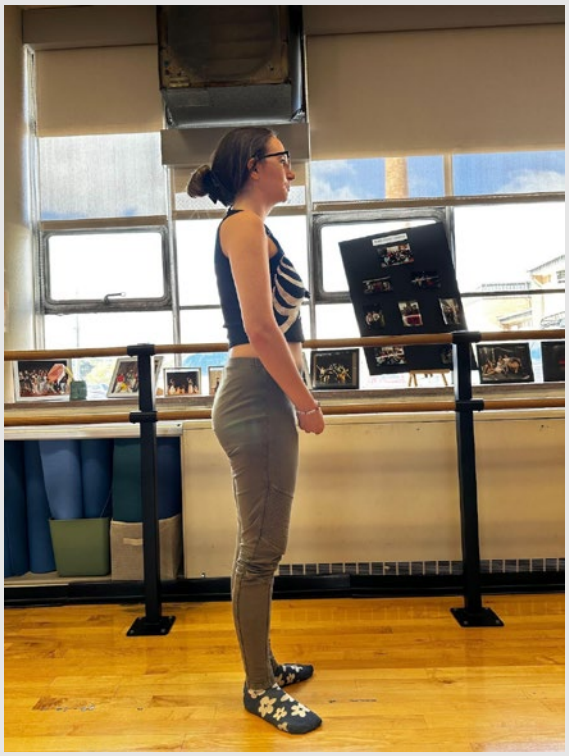


4 From left to right is the sequence order of the combination

Lastly, with each bend of the kneecap, your heel should be connected to the floor while lengthening your torso. (The general term I use is be 7ft tall within your spine, lengthen up but not out.) Even though your arm is moving and your knees are bending simultaneously, the torso region needs to remain lengthened and stable. In order to stabilize, you will need support from your abdominal muscles and psoas by slightly engaging them to maintain the correct alignment.



5A Diagrams of abdomen & psoas when active by Irene Dowd



5B Mover activating the abdomen and psoas

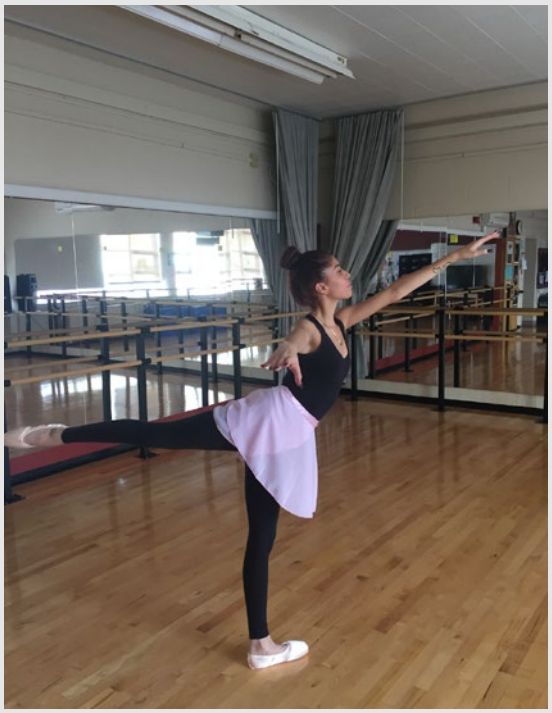
Readers, you are ready to try this small portion of a demi-plié combination. There is more to this combination than what I have explained. However, it does give you some perspective on the body awareness you need to embrace, in order to perform the movement exercise. The neurotransmitters are channeling through this system from your brain to the areas of your body that are required in order to successfully perform this combination. You are consciously aware and in control of how your body is moving in space. This is evidence that the somatic nervous system is working.

WRITING PRACTICE 1

REFLECT

Spend some time reflecting through writing: During the demi-plié combination, were you consciously aware of what your body was doing within the space where you were performing? Describe your experience.

6 Student is preparing to perform demi-plié in 5th position. This is in my contemporary dance 2 / production class, an intermediate level class. Students are working toward strengthening their muscles, increasing flexibility and enhancing coordination. Movement exercises are at an intermediate level to accommodate their growth in their technique.



7 Student performing an arabesque exercise outside of class. Intermediate to advanced students continue to practice these levels of technique. Continuing to strengthen and improve on their technical skills requires the use of both the somatic and autonomic nervous system.

While performing the dance exercise, you were commanding your mind and body by utilizing the somatic nervous system. The movement directions you applied on your body brought awareness to the skeletal and muscular structures within. The brain is sending out those commands, and the neurotransmitters are traveling to the areas of the torso, arms, and legs to accomplish the exercise efficiently. Even when writing your reflection of the experience, the movement you are creating in your writing activates your somatic nervous system, sending a signal from your brain to the areas of your arm, wrist, and hand. This requires a full presence from the participant in order to do these movement tasks effectively.

Movement practices such as dance and yoga require a mind-body connection. The only way to be successful in this practice is to be present in the moment. Your performance of the demi-plié combination required your whole self to be engaged. If, by chance, your mind wandered, then you probably missed a step, caught yourself, and jumped back in or simply gave up. The moment of catching yourself can bring a subtle shock to your system. If this did not happen for you, then think of a time where your mind may have wandered off and something pulled you back in. That subtle or intense shock brings you back into focus. The way your body reacts in that moment, combined with how it responds once that moment is over, impacts your mind-body connection. The autonomic nervous system is responsible for regulating these moments. Unlike the somatic nervous system, the autonomic nervous system works without your sense of awareness to regulate the functions in your body. Neurotransmitters are sent from the brain to regulate functions within your body such as your heartbeat, blood pressure, and digestion. This is where the sympathetic and parasympathetic system lies.

The sympathetic nervous system is our *fight, flight or freeze mode*. Under stressful situations, this system will stimulate and cause elevation in heart rate and blood pressure. Breathing patterns will shift, sweat glands will become active, and the digestive tract might cause upset stomach or low pain in the abdomen. When the body goes into survival mode, our muscles react by tensing up. Muscle tension is a common symptom when experiencing stressful situations. Tightness in the neck, jaw and chest, and cramping in the stomach, are physical symptoms that can happen in the body. I am sure that some of you, if you were to be pulled into an advanced class,would potentially experience some of these symptoms, if you were not comfortable at that advanced level. Any uncomfortable or stressful situation, great or small, causes your sympathetic nervous system to activate and go into survival mode. Cortisol, a hormone, is released into the body, sending signals that increase your heart rate, breath rate, and digestion, as well as numerous other autonomous reactions. A healthy autonomic system would eventually come out of this mode and the body would relax. For example, you may find the advanced class to

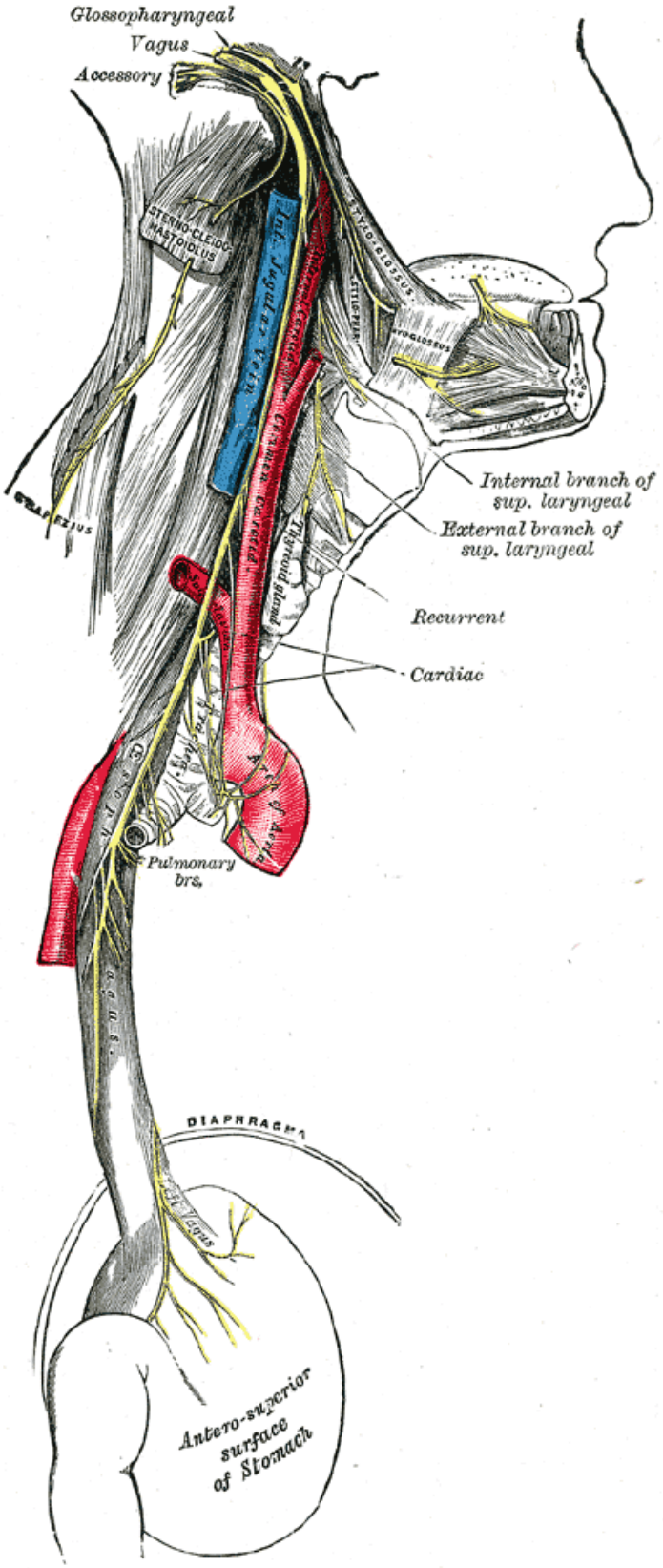
be hard, but you are managing it. Your body will allow you to lessen the panic that you experienced prior so that you can focus. Remaining in survival mode for prolonged periods of time would not be conducive for the body to function healthfully. Studies have shown that chronic stress causes the body to develop physiological issues. Headaches, chronic injuries in the body, digestion issues, and even obesity, are some indicative symptoms of an overly active sympathetic state.

The parasympathetic nervous system controls our calm, resting state. When the body is calm, our internal organs function at an optimal rate. The vagus nerve is part of the parasympathetic nervous system that helps regulate the body. This complex cranial nerve is integral to our mind-body connection. Essential to the parasympathetic nervous system, it aids in regulating our organs, immune system, and digestive tract. It is the largest cranial nerve, with its starting point in the medulla oblongata, which is located in the lower region of the brain.

The vagus nerve travels down the throat, past the heart, lungs,and abdomen, and ends in the intestines. The term vagal means "wanderer," which is exactly what this nerve does. As it moves from your brain to your gut, it branches out to other areas of your body. It is a vagabond nerve that moves messages from the brain to vital organs and involuntary muscles. This nerve assists the inflammatory reflex in regulating the immune system and glands. It regulates the muscles within the throat for swallowing and singing. It contracts and expands as we utilize our bodies' capabilities to perform these tasks along with our facial expressions and pupil dilation. This incredible nerve also bridges the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system, the two oppositional nerves that maintain and regulate the inner workings of our body. These three systems are integral parts that make up the autonomic nervous system.

We only know the impacts of the autonomic nervous system when we are on alert and when we come out of that alert. The brain identifies a threat and goes into survival mode. When the body is no longer in danger, it sends a message through the vagus nerve to come out of survival mode. The vagus nerve, essential to the parasympathetic system, will counteract these stressors. This conduit takes over the body by focusing on tasks to regulate it back to a calm state. Lowering the heart rate and decreasing blood pressure are some of the conditions of parasympathetic control. Depending on the severity of the stress, individuals can also experience an upset stomach, vomiting, dizziness, or fainting. These are also conditions activated by the parasympathetic nervous system. When the body overreacts to stress, the parasympathetic nervous system will go to extreme levels to bring the body out of the sympathetic state. Vasovagal syncope is an example of the parasympathetic nervous system going into overdrive. Vasovagal occurs when the blood pressure and heart rate drop significantly. The loss of blood flowing to the brain will cause

temporary dizziness and a brief loss of consciousness. Your body will faint, and therefore will have done its job of coming out of the panic state. The vagus nerve, being a part of the parasympathetic nervous system, will target vital areas of the body such as the heart, lungs and digestive system. This large cranial nerve is incredibly intertwined, and will go to extreme measures to bring the body back to rest.



Vagus nerve connection from the medulla oblongata to the digestive tract.

WRITING PRACTICE 2

REFLECT

Spend some time reflecting through writing: Write about a specific moment in your life when you experienced something incredible in a negative way for you. If you can try to remember, how did your body respond during this moment? How did your body respond shortly after? When you reflect back on this moment are you reliving the experience with some of the same feelings you had in that moment?

Now, write about a specific moment in your life when you experienced something incredible in a positive way for you. If you can try to remember, how did your body respond during this moment? How did your body respond shortly after? When you reflect back on this moment are you reliving the experience with some of the same feelings you had in that moment?

In 2021, K-12 public schools in the United States were figuring out ways to engage students in an educational routine. Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, some students were doing hybrid learning where they would do a mix of online and in-person learning while other students were still learning online. This time period was challenging for educators and students in the U.S. The impacts of the pandemic and the switch to online learning that occurred led to a learning delay in most students' achievements. Studies through the global consulting firm, McKinsey and Company, indicated students in the U.S public school system were at least 6 months behind in mathematics and 5 months behind in reading by the end of the 2020-2021 school year. These gaps hit hard, especially on BIPOC students in underserved socioeconomic urban settings. The lack of resources, adequate learning environment, access to technology, and proper internet services contributed to students falling behind. The impacts of the pandemic also contributed to the social and emotional wellbeing of students. Studies have shown in the National Institute of Health the excessive use of electronic devices and lack of in person instruction caused students chronic stress, sleep deprivation, and depression. Common symptoms among students are musculoskeletal pain, migraines, abdominal pains, anxiety, and panic attacks. There was a great shift in demeanor from many of the students who returned to the building that was beyond the typical characteristic of an adolescent. Educators had their hands full, not only with getting them back on track academically but the social and emotional aspects of them learning. From the observations in my classes during this time many students were disconnected.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the U.S did data research in 2021 on teenagers' mental health and wellbeing. The data found 42% of teenagers had feelings of hopelessness and 22% had thoughts of suicide. The World Health Organization (WHO) states, "Depression, anxiety and behavioral disorders are among the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents." The organization also believes not addressing these issues can potentially hinder them from thriving in adulthood. In the U.S. there has been a growing interest in mindfulness practices in schools over the last few years. Districts are seeing the benefits of how meditation and other mindfulness practices can decrease levels of stress among students and increase their engagement and focus.

In the fall of 2023 I was certified in meditation through the Satya Meditation and Yoga School through The Cleveland Studio. The meditation and teacher training program was led by founder Sara Syed. This intensive program gave me the necessary tools to reorganize my teaching practice so I could integrate this mindful practice into my curriculum. In the program we focused on intentions, breathwork, chakras, meditative writing, and yoga based principles. The work was purposeful and healing for me. I realized during this program I was carrying an enormous amount of stress in my body.

From the shift to online learning during the pandemic to face -to -face learning post- pandemic, educators in K-12 were grappling with safety measures that needed to be enforced, adapting to the social and emotional stability of the students and their families. All the while trying to adhere to new teaching methods that could get students back on track. In truth, the emphasis was solely on students and not on the welfare of the educator at first. Burnout among teachers everywhere increased during this time. In focusing on K-12 in the U.S. The National Center for Biotechnology Information defines *burnout* as:

> ... a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of social fulfillment. It is a state of psychophysical exhaustion, deterioration of relationships, and a sense of professional ineffectiveness and disillusionment that can occur in a wide range of work contexts. Employees become cynical about their work and experience a decrease in professional efficacy.

This is not to say mental well being was not offered to educators and staff but the problem was time to do these. This can be difficult for educators who have families or if these sessions are only offered during the day. Finding class coverage and paid time off to attend these can be problematic in the U.S. In the spring of 2023, the Rand Corporation, a nonpartisan research organization, conducted a survey on the well-being of educators and working adults, consulting 1,493 educators and 527 working adults. What they discovered was 56% of educators had a higher level of burnout compared to 45% working adults. 58% of educators experience frequent job related stress compared to 33% of working adults. I saw this level of burnout and stress occurring among my colleagues as well as myself.

My lack of patience with students, daily fatigue, and a sense of feeling overwhelmed were all due to the expectations placed on educators in the American education system. The majority of the time I was working in survival mode. I was experiencing chronic stress and it was impacting my teaching and personal life. Making this realization I enrolled in the Satya meditation program as a way to address the daily stress I was experiencing and to bring a new depth into my teaching practice.

You should sit in meditation for twenty minutes per day, unless you are busy; then you should meditate for one hour. – Zen Proverb

MEDITATION PRACTICE

Reader participation is required

Readers, I am going to ask you to try a meditation practice. If you have a relatively quiet space like an office or empty room where you can close your door I ask that you go there. If at this time you don't have access it is your choice to do the practice where you are or hold off until you are able to be in a space where you feel you can do this meditation. This practice can essentially be done in a quiet space or crowded space, this is up to you. The concept is to focus internally and not become distracted or succumb to the sounds around you. Allow yourself a moment to read through the instruction and then proceed with the practice. Set a timer for 20 minutes when you are ready to do the practice.

ASANA

Step 1

Get into a comfortable seated position with your head, neck and spine upright and aligned. Chin is slightly down and the back of your neck is lengthened. Make choices for yourself that will provide you with the most comfort: Below are a few options that can get you started. Choose one of them to do your practice in.

1. On the floor with your back against a wall. You can use a pillow, bolster or yoga mat to sit on or to use as back support if you need. Legs can be cross-legged or in front of you. Whatever is comfortable and that you can hold still for the duration of the practice.
2. Sit in a chair that has a high back, no or low back might be problematic due to your eyes being closed during the practice. Your equilibrium may be challenging to control. On a couch or bed. Adjust the cushions so your back can be upright. Once you have established yourself you are ready to begin.

PRANAYAMA

Step 2

Close your eyes or if you don't feel comfortable lower your eyes to a soft gaze. Inhale through your nose and exhale out your nose a couple of times to engage your circulatory system and begin a conscious pattern with your breath.

Box Breathing Ratio: Once you have established this pattern try this pranayama exercise called "Box Breathing." Inhale through your nose for 5 seconds – hold your breath for 5 seconds – exhale through your nose for 5 seconds – hold for 5 seconds. Repeat this pattern 4 times.

THE PRACTICE

Step 3 Keeping your eyes closed or in a soft gaze, continue to focus on the natural flow of your breath. Inhaling and exhaling through your nose taking notice of the sensation it brings. This is your focus for the practice, your breath. Remain focused on the sensation of your breath and nothing else. Thoughts will enter your mind, do not engage with them. Stay focused on the pattern of your breath. If you begin to feel yourself wander off into your thoughts, come back to your breath. You can repeat the box breathing as a way to gently redirect yourself back to the breath. Nice audible breaths can quiet the mind.

WRITING PRACTICE 3

REFLECT *Spend some time reflecting through writing:* Describe your experience while you meditated. What were your challenges with the pranayama practice? What came easily (if anything)?

The pranayama exercises found in yoga and meditation open up the channel between mind and body, bringing clarity and calmness to the mind. *Prana = life force energy and yama = control*. Calming the mind = calming the autonomic nervous system. It is within this moment, students can achieve a calm state of mind where they are present and engaged. Our education system in the United States can be complicated at times when it comes to integrating holistic practices. In looking at the scope of K-12 schools where standardized testing is a constant presence, it can be difficult to incorporate these important methods to an already packed curriculum, but I feel it is essential. I have utilized the pranayama methods in times where there was a disconnect among the students' retention and their engagement within the discussion topics in class. Teaching in high school (secondary) it is not easy to get teenagers to be still and focused. Especially if they are struggling due to chronic stress, forms of trauma or physical health issues. Taking time during the week for students to practice these meditative strategies have proven to be impactful to many of them.

I have used *pranayama methods* in my Contemporary Dance I class and with Bard Dance Company. In my Contemporary Dance I class I introduce movement composition. Students work on developing their personal movement style through movement inquiry, kinesthetic awareness, writing reflections, and their own movement history rooted in life experiences. This can be quite useful so students can express their narrative. For our beginning warm ups I would incorporate pranayama practice as a way for them to center before we began movement. I would ask them to find an intention to carry into their practice that day. As a dance and teaching artist, I understand the level of vulnerability it takes to share your creative work. I have shared my own experiences as a way to inspire and encourage the students. To me, it is essential that every student has an opportunity to find and share their artistic voice. There have been times in my classroom when I see students connect to their work in an open and receptive way. This task takes cultivating and fostering which can be tedious but it is essential if the objective is to engage the whole student.

In the 2024 spring semester I found many of my students experiencing chronic stress on a daily basis. The majority of these students were in their final semester at Bard Early College and there were a multitude of tasks they needed to accomplish in order to graduate. In addition to this, some of these students were working and helping their families. On one particular day in April, Bard Dance Company members came into class with varying levels of stress. Self-condemnation due to the strive for perfection, feeling overwhelmed by the everyday workload, and emotional sensitivity. April was the start of a busy performance season for them. They were a week away from the Cabaret show, a major production at the school that highlights the dance and music program. Members of the dance company held various jobs

in the production that included, performing, choreographing, lighting, costumes, and scenic design. Two weeks later members of the company were traveling to The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio to perform at the Ohio Dance Festival. Many have never had this opportunity to perform in front of professional dance artists from the region so this was a prestigious event for them. In addition to this performance, their high school prom, a formal dance for graduating seniors, was occurring that evening. There was a heightened energy in the space that became a distraction among the students.

Through conversations I have had with these students I knew they were dealing with high levels of stress. At times, these students would clash with one another during past rehearsals and technique class. Miscommunication, lack of mindfulness and patience was deepening within the group due to the distractions of their stress. I conducted a 20-minute pranayama meditation practice with the group. Through my recent observations of the class and the important upcoming events I knew we needed to take a moment to center ourselves.

In the beginning of the asana section, I made one change. Instead of having them lean against a wall or on their own, I had them use each other's backs for assistance. My reason behind this was to encourage support among each other both physically and mentally. It took a few minutes of adjusting to this version but they delved into the guided meditation practice. In the post discussion students had positive feedback on the meditative practice. They explained the before and after effects of the pranayama technique, the box breathing ratio, and how they became more relaxed and at ease as they would focus on their breath patterns. One student informed us that tears started to flow down their cheeks out of nowhere and they couldn't understand why that happened. It is common during somatic and meditative practices for the body to emote as a way of releasing tension held within. The energy within the room changed and the students' interactions with each other were less agitated and more welcoming. This was not my first or last experience conducting a meditation session with students at Bard High School Early College.

In March I held a meditation workshop during a lunch/free period in the early afternoon. Students signed up voluntarily for the session and came in with some experience with meditating. We discussed the benefits and simple practices they could do on a regular basis. I initiated an intention through a writing passage from the author, Yung Pueblo: "Taking a moment to figure out how you really feel instead of letting old patterns decide for you is one of the most authentic things you can do." This passage was in his book, "Clarity & Connection," under the chapter on self awareness. They reflected on their experience through private journal writing that followed after the practice. In addition to the writing practice I sent them a survey on the workshop for them to fill out. I explained that it was for me to get an

understanding on the impact of this mindful practice, that it would be anonymous, and to please speak from the heart. Unfortunately I only received feedback from one of the students but it did provide insight into the importance of having mindfulness practices in public schools.

Zen Meditation Workshop Survey #1
This is a survey on your experience taking the meditation workshop on Friday, March 8th. I appreciate you taking the time to reflect and answer these questions. Feel free to share as much or as little. Whatever is comfortable for you.

Describe how your mental state was coming into the workshop.
I was a little nervous because I didn't know what I was walking into or what to expect.
Describe how your body was feeling coming into the workshop.
I remember being cold but I was calm at the same time.
What moments in the meditation workshop resonated with you? (Only share what you feel comfortable sharing.)
Left blank
Describe how your mental state was after meditating.
It was at ease and I felt like there was nothing I had to worry about in that moment.
Describe how your body felt after meditating.
My body was sore in a way because I stayed in the same position almost the entire time. My feet were falling asleep too.
Did your meditation practice impact the rest of your day? If yes, explain how it did.
I think it made me more relaxed and open-minded because I just spent a period of time letting my thoughts flow.
Would you take this workshop again?
Absolutely.
Please share with me any additional comments you have about taking this workshop.
Left blank

In May I held another meditation workshop for students during a lunch/free period in the afternoon. Students that took this workshop were in their final weeks before graduating and had little to no experience with meditation. Similar to the March session, we discussed the impacts of this practice; the ways they can utilize these practices to ease tension and calm their minds regularly. I took them through a 20 minute guided pranayama meditation focusing on their breath. There was no private journaling afterwards due to the overlap of classes but I did send them the survey to fill out. Unfortunately, only one of the students completed the survey, but the response to the workshop does show how impactful mindfulness practices can be for adolescence.

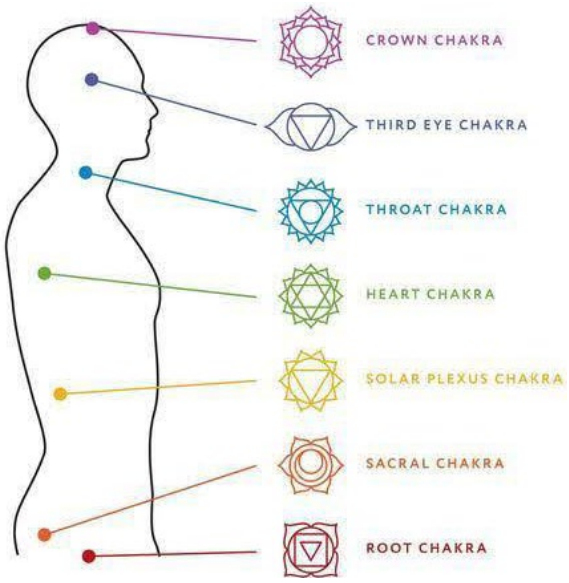
Meditation Workshop Survey #2
This is a survey on your experience taking the meditation workshop on Friday, May 24th. I appreciate you taking the time to reflect and answer these questions. Feel free to share as much or as little. Whatever is comfortable for you.

Describe how your mental state was coming into the workshop.
My mental state was just energy heavy, but also burnt out.
Describe how your body was feeling coming into the workshop.
It felt like normal mostly, just a little burnt out.
What moments in the meditation workshop resonated with you? (Only share what you feel comfortable sharing.)
I really enjoyed the box breathing, it helped me to focus more and get rid of my itchiness.
Describe how your mental state was after meditating.
I felt pretty calm, I had no nerves and was ready for the day after.
Describe how your body felt after meditating.
My body felt relaxed but my legs were asleep for a minute.
Did your meditation practice impact the rest of your day? If yes, explain how it did.
Yes, I feel much better. I went into work with a calm mindset and a relaxed body.
Would you take this workshop again?
Absolutely, it relaxed me amazingly
Please share with me any additional comments you have about taking this workshop.
Left blank

Finding solutions to redirecting negative patterns that disrupt the mind-body connection takes practice. Much like building a community within a classroom that engages and inspires students to strive for their fullest potential takes practice. The education system utilizes phrases such as, building blocks, stepping stones or scaffolding as structured ways to reach academic goals. When the mind and body are disconnected we can incorporate mindfulness practice as a way to regain focus and engagement.

In meditation, we focus on our chakras to bring balance to our body and regain mental clarity. Chakras are energy sources that are stacked vertically on the spinal column from the base of the spine to the crown of the head. Western views are not fully aligned with the inner workings of the Chakras. Scientifically, there is no research that indicates proof of their existence, however if we look at our nervous systems that we have discussed and the idea of bringing stability to our health and wellbeing. The seven chakras can be the building blocks to achieving a well balanced mind and body.

We start at the base of our spine with the *Root Chakra*. In meditation it is the foundation that holds the structure of our well-being. This is where our sense of groundedness, our identity lies within. The *Sacral Chakra* located in the sacrum of our spine is like water. Creativity, movement, and expression flow openly and freely. The *Solar Plexus Chakra* is the fire chakra. This represents transformation, patterns of consciousness that ignite new purpose and meaning. The *Heart Chakra* is our soul connection to love, compassion, and generosity. The *Throat Chakra* gives voice to our inner truths and ideas. This is where observation, writing, and speaking are channeled and expressed. The *Third Eye Chakra* is located slightly above our eyes in the frontal lobe of our brain. This is where intuition and mental clarity are forming. The final chakra is the *Crown Chakra*, the center of intelligence, meaning, and purpose. Each chakra represents an energy source that supports your physical and mental well-being. They have their own individual traits that contribute to the functioning of the body, however the stability of each chakra depends on the health of the previous chakra. When any chakra is disrupted a reaction occurs to the rest that throws off the balance of the mind and body. This can be true for our autonomic nervous system. Any irregularities to the functioning of that system will disrupt our flow of consciousness and physical well being.



The Seven Chakras

Becoming a deeply rooted body requires you to embrace the idea of immersing yourself into the mind-body connection. There is a coalescence between theory and movement that provides key elements to becoming connected. I believe these proprioceptive and metacognitive components emphasize movement, meditation, and writing to reflect. How mindful practices should play a pivotal role in educational institutions because students come from different life experiences that can impact their learning processes. Through the physiological aspect of movement we can gain an understanding of how breath control and body awareness shapes our understanding of the fluidity of movement. Knowing the cause of stress and how it can detract you from feeling centered. Through this knowledge, we apply strategies from meditation and writing to reflect as calming techniques to the mind-body connection. Through it all we write to reflect our understanding of these strategies and the impact these connections have made. A deeply rooted body activates these processes, perspectives and theories. By connecting these methods to your practice we can start to see the manifestation of the whole self.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Agyapong B, Obuobi-Donkor G, Burback L, Wei Y. Stress, Burnout, Anxiety and Depression among Teachers: A Scoping Review. Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2022 Aug 27;19(17):10706. doi: 10.3390/ijerph191710706. PMID: 36078422; PMCID: PMC9518388.

Akinrodoye MA, Lui F. Neuroanatomy, Somatic Nervous System. [Updated 2022 Nov 7]. In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2024 Jan-. Available from: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK556027/

Breit S, Kupferberg A, Rogler G, Hasler G. Vagus Nerve as Modulator of the Brain-Gut Axis in Psychiatric and Inflammatory Disorders. Front Psychiatry. 2018 Mar 13;9:44. doi: 10.3389/fpsyt.2018.00044. PMID: 29593576; PMCID: PMC5859128.

Buck-Pavlick, Helen. 2022. "Empowering Metacognition Through Dance Writing and Collaborative Dance Making." Journal of Dance Education 24 (2): 125–35. doi:10.1080/15290824.2022.2051041.

Campanelli S, Tort ABL, Lobão-Soares B. Pranayamas and Their Neurophysiological Effects. Int J Yoga. 2020 Sep-Dec;13(3):183-192. doi: 10.4103/ijoy.IJOY_91_19. Epub 2020 Sep 13. PMID: 33343147; PMCID: PMC7735501.

Cohen, Bonnie Bainbridge, et al. *Sensing, Feeling, and Action: The Experiential Anatomy of Body-Mind Centering*. 1994, openlibrary.org/books/OL15452489M/Sensing_feeling_and_action.

Cortés-Albornoz MC, Ramírez-Guerrero S, García-Guáqueta DP, Vélez-Van-Meerbeke A, Talero-Gutiérrez C. Effects of remote learning during COVID-19 lockdown on children's learning abilities and school performance: A systematic review. Int J Educ Dev. 2023 Sep;101:102835. doi: 10.1016/j.ijedudev.2023.102835. Epub 2023 Jun 14. PMID: 37361921; PMCID: PMC10266495.Cxm540.

"Support, Education Can Help Teachers with Post-Pandemic Burnout." The Daily, 7 Nov. 2023, thedaily.case.edu/cwru-researchers-support-education-can-help-teachers-with-post-pandemic-burnout/.

Dorn, E., Hancock, B., Sarakatsannis, J., & Viruleg, E. (2021, July 27). COVID-19 and education: The lingering effects of unfinished learning | McKinsey. McKinsey; McKinsey & Company. https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/covid-19-and-education-the-lingering-effects-of-unfinished-learning

Dowd, Irene. Taking Root to Fly : Articles on Functional Anatomy. I. Dowd, 2016.

hooks, bell. Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom. Routledge, 1994.

Kamenetz, Anya. "Schools Are Embracing Mindfulness, but Practice Doesn't Always Make Perfect." NPR.org, 27 Feb. 2020, www.npr.org/2020/02/27/804971750/schools-are-embracing-mindfulness-but-practice-doesnt-always-make-perfect.

Krowiak, S. (2020, May 7). The Vagus Nerve: Your Superhighway to Health. Yogainternational.com; Yoga International. https://yogainternational.com/article/view/the-vagus-nerve-your-superhighway-to-health/

Elaine Nicpon Marieb, and Katja Hoehn. Human Anatomy & Physiology. Pearson Benjamin Cummings, 2007.

LeWine, Howard E. "Understanding the Stress Response ." Harvard Health, Harvard Health Publishing, 3 Apr. 2024, www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/understanding-the-stress-response.

Ozamiz-Etxebarria N, Legorburu Fernnadez I, Lipnicki DM, Idoiaga Mondragon N, Santabárbara J. Prevalence of Burnout among Teachers during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Meta-Analysis. Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2023 Mar 10;20(6):4866. doi: 10.3390/ijerph20064866. PMID: 36981775; PMCID: PMC10049404.

Paturel, A. (2024, March 21). Bolster your brain by stimulating the vagus nerve. Cedars-Sinai. https://www.cedars-sinai.org/blog/stimulating-the-vagus-nerve.html

Pueblo, Yung. Clarity & Connection. Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2021.

Syed, S. (2023, September 29). Meditation Training Manual [Review of Meditation Training Manual].

Tatter, Grace. "Making Time for Mindfulness." Harvard Graduate School of Education, 23 Jan. 2019, www.gse.harvard.edu/ideas/usable-knowledge/19/01/making-time-mindfulness.

Tindle J, Tadi P. Neuroanatomy, Parasympathetic Nervous System. [Updated 2022 Oct 31]. In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2024 Jan-. Available from: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK553141/

Waxenbaum JA, Reddy V, Varacallo M. Anatomy, Autonomic Nervous System. [Updated 2023 Jul 24]. In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2024 Jan-. Available from: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK539845/

Will, Madeline. "What's Happening to Teacher Stress Levels." Education Week, 21 June 2023, www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/whats-happening-to-teacher-stress-levels/2023/06.

Young, Melissa. "How Box Breathing Can Help You Destress." Cleveland Clinic, 16 Aug. 2021, health.clevelandclinic.org/box-breathing-benefits.