

UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL

AN INQUIRY INTO THE EXPERIENCE OF PROFESSIONAL
CONTEMPORARY DANCERS STUDYING AND APPLYING THE
ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE TO DANCE:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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FERNANDE GIRARD

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

RÉSUMÉ	vi
ABSTRACT	vii
LANGUAGE.....	viii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER I	
REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	7
1.1 Under the umbrella of somatic education.....	7
1.2 Biographical sketch of F.M. Alexander.....	13
1.21 F.M. Alexander’s discoveries and writing.....	15
1.3 Literature on the Alexander Technique.....	21
1.31 Lulie Westfeldt and Wilfred Barlow.....	21
1.32 Frank Pierce Jones.....	22
1.33 John Austin and Pearl Ausubel.....	24
1.34 Chloë Stallibrass.....	25
1.35 Anne Matthews.....	25
1.36 Iris Kaplan and Don Krim.....	26
1.4 The Alexander Technique and dance.....	30
1.41 The Alexander Technique and health of the dancer.....	31
1.42 The Alexander Technique and dance training.....	34
1.43 Theses and dissertations.....	37
CHAPTER II	
METHODOLOGY.....	44
2.1 Choice of qualitative study.....	44

2.2 Participants in the study.....	48
2.21 Participant dancers.....	48
2.22 Participant practitioner.....	50
2.3 Setting.....	52
2.4 Data collection.....	52
2.41 Journals.....	54
2.42 Interviews.....	55
2.5 Analysis of data.....	58
2.51 The researcher.....	59
2.52 Analysis.....	60
2.53 Triangulation.....	62
2.6 Importance of the study	62
CHAPTER III	
RESULTS/DISCUSSION.....	63
3.1 Participant histories.....	65
3.2 The Alexander Technique session.....	69
3.21 The practitioner's approach.....	70
3.22 The dancers' perception of the practitioner's approach.....	70
3.23 The dancers' descriptions of the sessions.....	71
3.3 Experience of the practitioner.....	73
3.4 Experience of participants in the sessions.....	76
3.41 Muscular feedback.....	77
3.42 Reactions to change.....	80
3.43 Awareness, sensation and direction.....	84
3.5 Application in dance.....	87
3.51 Attention to process.....	88
3.52 Strategy.....	91
3.53 Application to choreography.....	95
3.6 Acknowledgment of differences between the pedagogy of dance and that of the Alexander Technique.....	96

3.7 Experience applying the technique in non-dance activities.....	101
3.8 Change of perception	104
CONCLUSION.....	107
APPENDIX A	
LETTER OF CONSENT AND CONFIDENTIALITY.....	111
APPENDIX B	
LETTER OF INVITATION.....	117
APPENDIX C	
SAMPLER OF QUESTIONS USED IN INTERVIEWS.....	120
APPENDIX D	
DESCRIPTION OF A TYPICAL ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE SESSION.....	122
APPENDIX E	
JACQUELINE: CITATIONS IN FRENCH.....	126
APPENDIX F	
SUGGESTED GUIDE FOR THE COMPOSITION OF THE PARTICIPANT DANCERS' JOURNALS.....	133
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	135

ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a qualitative study describing the experience of two contemporary professional dancers studying the Alexander Technique and applying its principles to dance. It also describes the experience of an Alexander Technique practitioner teaching dancer participants. Over a period of 10 weeks, the dancer participants each had 20 private lessons in the Alexander Technique.

The data collected from participant journals and interviews contained many reports indicating the transfer of Alexander principles to diverse activities, including dance training. The results demonstrate the complexity and difficulty of applying the Alexander Technique to dance rehearsal and performance within a short time period. The journals and interviews showed progressive use of vocabulary that indicated perceptual change and development of strategies that could lead to future applicability of the Alexander Technique to dance. The study also hints at how interviews and journals can assist the process of teaching and learning.

This study could be of interest to dancers in a learning process with somatic approaches and/or teachers of both dance and somatics.

Keywords: Alexander Technique, dance, somatic education

RÉSUMÉ

À partir d'une étude qualitative, le mémoire décrit l'expérience vécue par deux danseurs professionnels contemporains qui s'engagent dans l'apprentissage de la technique Alexander dans le but d'appliquer ces principes à la danse. L'étude décrit également l'expérience du praticien qui enseigne aux danseurs participants.

Durant une période de dix semaines, chaque danseur a reçu vingt leçons privées en technique Alexander. Ainsi, l'étude décrit l'application de cette technique par les danseurs, autant dans leur entraînement en danse que durant leurs répétitions. Les données recueillies, qui consistent en journaux de bord et entretiens semi structurés, contiennent plusieurs informations indiquant l'application des principes issus de la technique Alexander aux classes de danse. Dans un premier temps, l'étude a démontré qu'en tout début d'apprentissage les danseurs ont dû modifier leurs paramètres de sensation de même que leur intention dans la réalisation de la tâche. Dans un deuxième temps, l'étude révèle que les danseurs ont expérimenté plusieurs niveaux d'application de la technique Alexander à différentes activités quotidiennes telles que la marche, l'écriture, et la bicyclette. Dans un troisième temps, les danseurs ont fait part de la facilité d'intégrer les principes somatiques aux mouvements issus du ballet de même que dans les classes de danse contemporaine dans lesquelles le processus était primordial.

Cependant, les résultats démontrent la complexité et la difficulté d'application de la technique Alexander au travail de répétition ainsi qu'à la performance en raison de la courte période de l'étude. L'étude a révélé que l'utilisation des principes somatiques était possible dans le contexte de la répétition lorsque le danseur avait le temps de s'approprier le mouvement. Enfin, les résultats démontrent l'importance du journal de bord et de l'entretien dans le processus d'apprentissage et de l'enseignement de la technique Alexander.

Cette étude vise à fournir des connaissances aux danseurs en situation d'apprentissage d'une approche somatique ainsi qu'aux enseignants en danse et en somatique.

Mots-clés : technique Alexander, danse, éducation somatique

LANGUAGE

Throughout this paper, when I have used quotations from French authors, the quotes appear in the text in my translation, with the original French in footnotes. Material from the one French speaking participant in the study also appears in my translation in the text, but, because of the large volume of material involved, the original French is situated in Appendix E.

For the sake of clarity, throughout this paper, I use the masculine pronoun to imply either gender.

INTRODUCTION

This study was motivated by years of teaching both dance and somatics¹, and by a strong desire to understand the two way transfer that occurs between the fields. I teach dance with a somatic understanding, and I teach somatics, inevitably, with my embodied dance experience in mind. Somatic education² involves a process of self-observation and self-awareness as a means of improving one's physical organisation in interaction with his environment.

When I was in my twenties and enrolled in the teacher training program of the National Ballet School in Toronto, I studied the Feldenkrais Method for a period of one year (classes twice a week). Although it was at the time one of my favourite classes, I did not realise that this exposure to a somatic method would eventually lead to a new career. Years later, when I was dancing in New York, I suffered a back injury that forced me to take time off from dance. I began studying the Alexander Technique, not only to get back on my feet, but also to bring more awareness and efficiency to my everyday activities, and thus, to my dancing. The desire to investigate the work more thoroughly led to my entering a three-year Alexander Technique teacher training program in 1987.

The Alexander Technique, which I describe more thoroughly in the review of literature, was developed around the beginning of the 20th century by Frederick Matthias Alexander. Mentioned by Hanna (1993) as the first of the somatic methods, it is an educational method for improving overall functioning through, among other things, the elimination of acquired postural habits. In a unique process of hands-on work and verbal guidance, the Alexander

¹ Somatics is a term defined by Hanna (1983) as: "The art and science of the inner-relational process between awareness, biological function, and environment, all three factors being understood as a synergistic whole: the field of somatics."

² When I use the terms somatic education or somatic method in this paper, I refer primarily to the methods developed between 1900 and 1960, by the somatic pioneers: F.M. Alexander (Alexander Technique), Gerda Alexander (Eutony), Moshe Feldenkrais (Feldenkrais Method), Mabel Todd (Ideokinesis), and Bonne Bainbridge Cohen (Body-Mind Centering).

student learns to become aware of how he initiates movement, and learns to alter his behaviour through a process of thought that allows him to directly alter muscle tone. Alexander was one of the first to recognize the primacy of the tonic neck reflexes in human postural reflexes. The Alexander teacher's ability to directly communicate through touch improved use of the postural support system is unique amongst the somatic methods.

In 1990, I progressively made a transition from dancing to teaching the Alexander Technique, working with both dancers and non-dancers. I realised that it was often more difficult for dancers than for non-dancers to apply the principles of the technique. Dancers have, in some respects, developed heightened awareness of themselves to enable them to reproduce movement accurately. Using strategies such as spatial orientation and shape, for example, they strongly depend on acquired habits as a means to reproducing movement. Attempts to abandon these habitual patterns often lead to an immediate sense of loss of control, and this, however temporary, can be more difficult for a trained mover used to snapping off multiple pirouettes than it is for an office worker. Dancers may be tempted to revert to habitual patterns to achieve what their dance teachers or choreographers demand.

Two of my past teaching experiences have been ongoing sources of inspiration in my work in both dance and somatics. It was during these experiences that I first looked objectively at the application of the Alexander Technique to dance. In 1998, Carla Maxwell, the Artistic Director of the Limon Dance Company, invited me to teach the company ballet class for a period of three weeks. At the time I was giving private Alexander Technique lessons to many of the Limon dancers. I observed rehearsals to better prepare my ballet classes with the needs of the repertoire in mind (at the time, the company was working on "Dark Elegies", choreographed by Anthony Tudor). I found this teaching experience both rewarding and enriching. Because the ballet class supported the individual Alexander Technique work that the dancers were doing with me, deep changes occurred very quickly. It was an ideal situation, and one that the dancers still recalled and spoke positively of three years later.

Also, for a period of six years, I acted as rehearsal director for the works of Suzanne Linke for the dancer Roxane D'Orléans Juste, as well as acting as artistic advisor for her solo concerts. Roxane studied the Alexander Technique extensively with both Lawrence Smith and me, so I was able to observe at close hand how Roxane was able to apply the Alexander Technique principles in the learning and performing of very complex solos. This helped her to maintain her physical health, as well as to maximize her expressive potential. Unfortunately, at the time, I was not collecting data about the experience, nor analyzing and writing about it – I was totally immersed in the experience, and fascinated by it.

I often notice in my Alexander Technique practice that my clients find the need to relate what they are learning to something they already know, and that this need to work from the familiar impedes their progress by preventing them from trying something new. They may need to find new terms of reference to define a new experience, but first they must simply immerse themselves in the experience. Learning is not, after all, like putting on a new piece of clothing, or buying a new car which we are anxious to take possession of immediately. I do not mean that we should ignore or devalue past experience, but I wonder how we can prevent past experience from dominating all actions, and thus allow ourselves to investigate new possibilities. This is a challenge for those of us in dance, particularly at the professional level, because we are geared to producing, and to producing quickly. How can we create a learning environment that would assist and permit the young dancer-in-training to value process, and to carry this deeper awareness of process through his career? Just as it takes years to train a dancer, it may take years to truly incorporate the complexity of somatic work into one's dancing – I should say, into one's life. As Fortin (1998) pointed out in her paper, *Un rare savoir*, to facilitate integration of somatic concepts to dance, institutions must allow experimentation and experience to take place, without placing pre-conceived limitations on the process. This point of view is also expressed by Green (1999) and Fitt (1996).

Why is applying somatic work to dance so difficult? Is it the manner in which it is presented? Is it an innate resistance to change, a need to take comfort in the familiar, no matter how ineffective and damaging it may be? Or perhaps it is because we still view somatic methods as something to be added on, instead of as essential methods for re-

evaluating our ways of thinking and relating to ourselves and the world around us. Dewey (1938), who studied with Alexander for over 30 years, suggests that the Alexander Technique should be used to inform our basic ideas about education, and integrated into our means of acquiring skills at an early stage.

Today's dancer is frequently called upon to perform highly athletic, and often repetitive, movement, which is created in the minds of choreographers, or even, increasingly, on virtual models that may not respect the capabilities of the actual body. Going through the process of analysing my own movement patterns made me realise how ill-equipped most dance students are to meet the requirements of today's dance careers. The movement efficiency that makes dancers less susceptible to injury and, at the same time, renders them more expressive, requires the development of acute sensorial awareness, the sharpening of cognitive faculties, as well as the development of physical abilities. It requires analysis of the action to be carried out, reasoning out of the means whereby the actions may best be accomplished, attention during the action, and finally, reflection upon completion of the action. When Perrenoud (1998) writes about the development of abilities important to teaching, he mentions three important stages of reflection: before the action; during the action; and post-action. These steps echo what is demanded of both teacher and student in the Alexander Technique process. As a teacher of dance and somatics, I became increasingly aware of the importance of applying somatic methods to dance, not just for the physical training of the dancers, but as a pedagogic means to improve the performance of both student and teacher, as well as their interrelation. In fact, somatic study is now part of the curriculum of many professional schools and university programs in dance all over the world, and has been the subject of studies looking at its application to various aspects of dance (Fortin, 1994; Fortin et al., 2002; Long, 2002; and Oliver, 1994)

The present research gives me a better opportunity to study the process of integrating concepts from the Alexander Technique into dance. Currently, most of my teaching is with undergraduate students majoring in dance at the Université du Québec à Montréal. In this program, somatics is a regular part of the curriculum. A pedagogic committee, of which I am

a member, meets weekly to assure, amongst other things, the use of effective teaching strategies that are coherent with a somatic philosophy.

This research investigates the experience of professional contemporary dancers studying the Alexander Technique and applying it to their dancing. I made the choice to use professional dancers, rather than the students who I teach daily, because I hoped that their experience, as well as the high level of rehearsal and performance they were engaged in on a regular basis, would provide a mature level of reflection. I will also look at the experience of the practitioner in the teaching process with the dancers. I hope that the results of this study will inform us on how to better facilitate the integration of somatic material by professional as well as pre-professional dancers.

In the literature, much has been written on the Alexander Technique from a descriptive point of view, sometimes in relation to a specific activity (for example, swimming, horseback riding, acting, singing, piano playing, etc). Some scientific studies, which I will describe later, look at the effect of the Alexander Technique on health – for example on respiratory function (Austin and Ausubel, 1992, and on Parkinson's Disease (Stallibrass, Sissons and Chalmers, 2002).

Several qualitative studies, notably, one relating to sport (Krim, 1993), and one relating to piano playing (Kaplan, 1994), both of which I will describe in my review of literature, have examined the participant experience in the study of the Alexander Technique. Although many articles have been written on the subject of dance and the Alexander Technique, the experience of professional dancers integrating the technique in dance has not been extensively empirically studied. Thus far, no research into the Alexander Technique and dance has looked at both the participants (Alexander students) and the practitioner (Alexander teacher instructing the participants), when that practitioner is someone other than the researcher. Thus far, no books have been written on the subject of dance and the Alexander Technique.

My primary research question is: How do professional contemporary dancers experience the study of the Alexander Technique and its application to their dancing? My secondary research question is: How does an Alexander Technique teacher experience the process of giving a series of lessons to professional contemporary dancers?

Because the focus of this study is the experience of the participants, I have made the decision to do a qualitative study. According to Patton (1990), qualitative study is well suited when one is investigating the meaning of experience. I will study a small number of subjects over a 10 week period. The data for the study will be collected from participant journals and semi-structured interviews conducted by myself with the participants. Although I expect that the study may trigger some change due to the dancers' awareness and understanding of the Alexander Technique principles, I am fully aware that, due to the limited time frame for this study (ten weeks), it may take more time to see the full extent of the possible integration of these principles in their dancing.

My research will be presented in this thesis in the following way. The first chapter will be devoted to a review of the literature on the Alexander Technique and on the Alexander Technique as it relates to dance. In the second chapter, I will outline the methodology. And in the third chapter, I will present and discuss the data collected in the study, supported by theory from the literature and by my own reflections on the material. The data from the practitioner participant will be intertwined with that from the participant dancers as appropriate. I will conclude with a summary of the findings and with my recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER I

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of the literature is divided into five sections. The first section takes a broad view of somatic education, and how it has arisen from the current needs of western society. The second section is composed of a biographical sketch of F.M. Alexander, the founder of the Alexander Technique. The third is composed of a brief description of his discovery and his writing. The fourth section reviews the books written on the Alexander Technique, scientific studies on the technique, and some theses pertinent to my subject. The fifth section deals with literature on the Alexander Technique in relation to dance. Within this review of the literature, I will hint at some of my methodological choices, which I will explain in more detail in the methodology section.

1.1 Under the umbrella of somatic education

The following section is not extensive, but is intended to present, with some examples, the role of somatic education in society at large, the society in which the dancer's "self" is forged. By acknowledging and attempting to understand the impacts of society and culture on the individual (dancer or other), I hope to better understand how forces outside the dance class and rehearsal studio effect the state of the dancer. Many authors have tackled this subject more exhaustively, among them: Eddy (2000), Fraleigh (1996), Green (2000, 1999), Hanna (1976, 1986), Johnson (1995, 1992), and Le Breton (1997).

I will first briefly define a few terms, and will then present an historical perspective on somatic education. Writers from the disciplines of philosophy, psychology and physiology have explored the unity of mind and body, and have struggled to express the complex interactions between these aspects of the human being. From William James to Michel Foucault, they have attempted to define the role of consciousness in human action. Over one hundred years ago, F.M. Alexander, an Australian actor, stumbled into the realm of mind/body exploration, and was perhaps the first to evolve a method for applying his discoveries to the conscious control of mind/body response. He was followed by others, including Moshe Feldenkrais, Lulu Sweigard, Gerda Alexander, and Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, who, in theory, research and practice, attempted to come to grips with what Alexander (1986) called the *self*, that is, the whole person – mind and body considered as one indivisible whole. Alexander (1986) wrote: “[...] I prefer to call the psychophysical organism simply ‘the self’ and to write of it as something ‘in use’ which ‘functions’ and ‘reacts’” (p. xxxvi). Although we may speak of the use of a hand, for example, it must be understood that the whole self is involved in any act, whether it is defined, for the sake of clarity, as either physical or mental. *Use* refers to how we carry out an activity with the self as instrument, understanding that the self is always active, even in sleep, as long as we live.

The above mentioned pioneers developed approaches designed to heighten awareness, as a means of establishing conscious choice of action, in the place of automatic response. Students of these methods become more aware of neuromuscular activity and how information gleaned through the senses affects their relationship to their environment. It is important to note that these pioneers developed their approaches in search of solutions to personal difficulties that were unresponsive to conventional therapeutic methods. All went on to devote their lives to evolving and teaching the principles that they had successfully applied to their own conditions.

Hanna (1983), recognising the common ground shared by several of these methods, appropriated the term *soma* (a word of Greek origin meaning “body”), which he uses it to denote the whole person, replacing terms such as *body/mind* which tended to perpetuate dualistic notions of body and soul. He coined the term *somatics*, which he defines as:

SOMATICS (*so-ma'-tiks*) n. pl. (*construed as singular*) 1. The art and science of the inner-relational process between awareness, biological function, and environment, all three factors being understood as a synergistic whole: the field of somatics. 2. The study of the soma, soma being the biological body of functions by which and through which awareness and environment are mediated. It is understood that the word soma designates any living organism, animal or plant. It is also understood that all such somas have, to some degree, the capacity for awareness (sensorium) of the environment and intentional action (motorium) in the environment. 3. In common usage somatics relates to somas of the human species, whose sensoria and motoria are relatively free from the determination of genetically fixed behaviour patterns, thus allowing learning to determine the inter-relational process between awareness, biological function and environment. [Gk. Somatikos, soma, somat - body. F. somatique.] (p.1).

Later, Hanna (1986) refers to the *soma* as “[...] a process of experience and nothing but experience. This experience is two-layered, extending from the layer of the unconscious core to the layer of conscious cortex surrounding the core” (p. 57). He redefines somatics as “[...] the field which studies the soma: namely, the body as perceived from within by first person perception” (p. 4). In addition to his books on the subject, Hanna (1970, 1989, 1993) started the journal *Somatics*, which he produced and edited from 1976 until his death in 1990. In it, he published his essays as well as those of somatic practitioners from various disciplines. *Somatics* is still being published.

The terms somatics and somatic education grew to encompass many methods for improving consciousness of the self in action and response. Fortin (2002) cites Mangione (1993) who divides the development of somatic education into three periods, defined as: the period between the turn of the century and 1930, during which the somatic pioneers developed their methods; 1930 to 1970, a period during which the methods were disseminated by students of the pioneers; and the period from 1970 to the present (1993, at the time of writing), during which the different methods were integrated into the study and practice of therapists, psychologists, educators and artists. To these, Fortin (2002) adds two further periods

covering the last two decades, the first of which she defines as: “the development of idiosyncratic practices” (p. 131). Fortin explains that:

Early in its development, somatics formed a ‘community of practice’, a connected but dispersed group of individuals revolving around the pioneers who often gave their name to their methods. In order to become a member of a specific community of practice, you had to go through a training certification varying in length and focus from one training to another. This is still the case, though today there is a greater variety of somatic practices, more inclusiveness, and more pathways to studying somatic methods. Practices are mutating in a context of cross-fertilization with people sharing the same kind of interests. (p.131)

The second period Fortin defines as: “[...] the growth of a community of researchers” (p.131). World-wide, researchers are studying somatic methods, which has led to a quest for new methods of research and to the cooperation of practitioners from different disciplines. Somatics has entered universities and we are starting to have knowledge based on empirical studies of a growing number of researchers. This study falls within this ongoing period.

“The body is a cultural and social given: it is automatically ‘text’.”³ (Mévite and Planche, 1998, p. 64). We cannot go further and look at the dancer without first considering the state of the whole person and the influence and demands of Western society that serve to create as well as to obstruct its individuality. An example of this is cited by Johnson (1992). Referring to ideal bodies, he writes of the pressures to shape ourselves according to external images (in culture and society) and how this can disconnect us from our own experience or, more importantly, from our sense of ourselves. These images exist outside of ourselves, and we are constantly bombarded by them. “Altering the morbid dynamics of our culture requires us to loosen their hold on our flesh” (p. 14). As Stinson (1984) suggests:

We must develop the body as an organ for sensing, for knowing, for expanding our consciousness, rather than as an organ of control. Only through an emphasis on sensation and consciousness will our bodies become a link with others, rather than a hard outline separating us from the world in which we live. (p. 145)

Style dictates much of the shape of our constructed environment. Today, at least in Western society, fashion dictates, perhaps to a greater extent than climate, what we wear, and what we wear inevitably effects how we use our bodies. We go from flat-soled shoes to five-inch

heels, from steel-toed boots to narrow shoes with pointed toes. Even the design of the furniture that we are coaxed to buy for comfort or for support reflects serious misunderstanding of the human form.

Altogether the environment is an important medium through which culture is expressed, and part of its power stems from the fact that it works continuously and often without our conscious awareness. Its messages are all the more powerful for being subliminal. (Cranz, 1998, p. 8)

Montagu (1986) writes: “[...] from the moment of birth every society has evolved its own unique ways of dealing with the child. It is on the basis of repeated sensory experiences of the culturally prescribed stimulations that the child learns how to behave according to the requirements of his culture” (p. 295).

In our computerised era, the marvels of technology allow us to relate to the world through a television screen. We can shop, pay our bills, order dinner, watch films and communicate with others without leaving the numbed collapse of the lounge chair. In order to master the enormous quantity of information required to flourish in our culture, children are required to spend extensive periods of time seated, often in badly designed chairs, adapting themselves to work at desks. According to Cranz (1998), we have become a seated society. The English word *sit* is derived from the Latin *sedare*, meaning *to calm or sedate*. Are we becoming a sedated society, as well as a seated one? In a study (which I will describe later) done with primary school children, Matthews (1984) finds that the study of the Alexander Technique has a positive effect on learning. What her study demonstrates is that children can be taught to prevent the patterns of misuse that usually arise from contact with the constructed world of chairs and televisions and exams - that simply teaching children to sustain awareness of themselves in their daily tasks can lead to improved functioning on all levels. Cranz (1998) states in her book, *The Chair*, “We still need anthropologists to remind us that almost everything - including how we hold our bodies - should be understood in its cultural context. Hewes emphasised that postural variations are culturally, not anatomically, determined” (p. 288). In an article, Mévite and Planche (1998) point out that the body becomes an economic

³“Le corps est une donnée culturelle et sociale; automatiquement il est ‘texte’.”

target, a work force, at the service of society, to be used for whatever purpose society obliges. The body is merchandise to be exploited economically as well as aesthetically.

An essay by philosopher Shusterman (1999) explores the importance of somatic education to the field of aesthetics, and proposes a new discipline that he calls somaesthetics. Shusterman defines somaesthetics, as “[...] the critical, meliorative study of the experience and use of one’s body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation (aisthesis) and creative self-fashioning. It is [...] devoted to the knowledge, discourses, practices, and bodily disciplines that structure such somatic care or can improve it” (p. 302). His proposal is broken down into three fundamental dimensions: analytic somaesthetics, pragmatic somaesthetics and practical somaesthetics. “Analytic somaesthetics describes the basic nature of bodily perceptions and practices, and also their function in our knowledge and construction of reality” (p.304). The second dimension, “[...] pragmatic somaesthetics has a distinctly normative, prescriptive character – by proposing specific methods of somatic improvement and engaging in their comparative critique” (p. 304). And finally, practical somaesthetics is “[...] all about actually practising such care through intelligently disciplined body work aimed at somatic self-improvement (whether in a representational, experiential, or performative mode)” (p.307).

Shusterman (1999) writes of how awareness of somatic functioning can help one to “[...] avoid unhealthy consequences, which include not only pain, but a dulling of the senses, a diminution of aesthetic sensitivity and pleasure” (p. 303). He raises the point that often the models we follow in our society are stereotypes that reduce the body to “[...] an external object – a mechanical instrument of atomized parts, measurable surface and standardized norms of beauty. They ignore the body’s subject role as the living locus of beautiful personal experience” (p. 306). In his proposal, he gives priority to the awareness of the lived experience of every individual. He promotes a Deweyan awareness of the self functioning and experiencing.

Within Shusterman's dimension of practical somaesthetics, somatic education could be expected to heighten the sense of kinaesthetic empathy. Kinaesthetic empathy, a term often used in dance therapy (Serlin, 1997), denotes our tendency to feel in our bodies what we see in the bodies of others. It perhaps has its origin in an evolved ability that allows us to learn quickly by imitation. Heightened kinaesthetic empathy could translate to the dancer being more responsive to demonstrated material – if a choreographer can demonstrate a particular muscular quality in a movement, the somatics-trained dancer may have more acute kinaesthetic empathy to respond to it. Kinaesthetic empathy is also one of the ways that we perceive and appreciate dance – we feel it in our bodies. According to Blumenthal (1996), “Dance is movement poetry which the audience receives visually and feels in their body” (p. 76). By extension, the more aware and well-organized the self is, the more it will be able to respond kinaesthetically to what it perceives. In other words, kinaesthetic empathy is one of the tools of the aesthete. And the study of a somatic method, by helping the student to find and maintain a better organized, more open state, could be said to make him, as well, a better observer and responder, and, according to Dewey (1980), a better thinker. He writes, in his book, *Art as Experience*:

The senses are the organs through which the live creature participates directly in the ongoings of the world about him. In this participation the varied wonder and splendor of this world are made actual for him in the qualities he experiences. This material cannot be opposed to action, for motor apparatus and “will” itself are the means by which this participation is carried on and directed. It cannot be opposed to “intellect”, for mind is the means by which participation is rendered fruitful through sense; by which meanings and values are extracted, retained, and put to further service in the intercourse of the live creature with his surroundings. (p. 22)

1.2 Biographical sketch of F.M. Alexander

Frederick Matthias Alexander was born on January 20, 1869, in Wynard, Tasmania. He was born prematurely and was not expected to live for more than a few weeks. Throughout his childhood, he was often sick, suffering from asthma and other respiratory problems. Due to this, he attended school only briefly, relying on private coaching from the village schoolmaster for his education. This left him free to spend his days roaming the countryside

near his home, observing animals and nature and, as his health improved, boating, fishing and swimming. His life-long love of horses began when he was eight or nine years old and he became quite knowledgeable about their training and management.

When he was sixteen, Alexander found work as a clerk in a nearby tin mining company. This enabled him to save enough money to pursue his true passion, acting. In his day, dramatic recitals were an important form of entertainment, and Alexander demonstrated great natural ability in local amateur productions. In 1888, he left for Melbourne to study elocution, dramatic art and the violin with the best available teachers. He soon formed his own amateur dramatic company, specialising in one-man Shakespeare recitals, and embarked on a career as a professional elocutionist and reciter.

By 1894, Alexander had toured extensively, received excellent reviews for his work, and established a very good reputation with the public. It was during a three-month tour of New Zealand that he first began to experience problems with his voice. What began as hoarseness worsened until, on one occasion, he completely lost his voice during a performance. It was as though the respiratory problems he had suffered as a child had returned. He sought help from vocal experts and doctors and was given medication and told to gargle and to rest his voice. Nothing he tried offered more than temporary relief. Finally, one of his doctors ordered complete voice rest for two full weeks before his next recital. He did as he had been directed, and all went well until he was nearly halfway through the performance, when he began to get hoarse, audibly gasping for breath. By the end of the performance, he could hardly speak. Alexander feared that he would be forced to give up a successful career, one that he loved.

The following day, he returned to the same doctor, whose only advice was that he should continue with the treatment. Alexander (1984) asked him, "If my voice was perfect at the beginning of my recital, yet had deteriorated so much that by the end I could barely speak, is it not fair to conclude that it was something I was doing that evening in using my voice that was the cause of the trouble?" (p. 4). After thinking for a moment, the doctor concurred, and Alexander went further: "Can you tell me then, what it was that I did that caused the

trouble?” The doctor admitted that he could not. “Very well, if that is so,” Alexander replied, “then I must try to find out for myself” (p. 4).

Thus began Alexander’s lifelong study of himself and of human behaviour. Through self-study, he eventually solved his voice problem and, in so doing, developed what has been called, by many, the father of somatic disciplines – a method of self-observation, self-analysis and self-direction, as well as a method of hands on work to facilitate the process in others. (I will describe his discoveries in detail in the next section.) He soon resumed his acting career, becoming director of the Sydney Operatic and Dramatic Conservatorium, where he began teaching an early form of his method to young actors. His work came to the attention of an eminent Sydney physician, who saw that Alexander had discovered something of great importance, and encouraged him to travel to London.

Alexander established, in 1931, a school to train teachers in his technique. He continued teaching in London (and in the United States, during World Wars I and II) until his death in 1955. His work has been recognised and praised by important figures from the worlds of philosophy, sociology, science, medicine, literature, visual arts and performing arts (Coghill, 1929; Dewey, 1957; Huxley, 1937; and Tinbergen, 1974).

1.21 F.M. Alexander’s discoveries and writing

F.M. Alexander wrote four books - *Man’s Supreme Inheritance* (1910/1988), *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* (1923/1985), *The Use of the Self* (1932/1984), and *The Universal Constant in Living* (1941/1986). *The Use of the Self* (1984), Alexander’s third book, arose from his desire to explain the process which led to his discoveries. In it, he recounts his years of self-observation, a process that Tinbergen (1974) referred to in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech as: “[...] one of the true epics of medical research” (p. 24).

Before going on to relate Alexander’s discoveries, I need to define terms that have specific meanings in the context of Alexander’s work. Five principles that help to define and

differentiate his work are as follows: (1) recognition of force of habit; (2) recognition of faulty sensory appreciation; (3) inhibition; (4) direction; and (5) primary control.

Recognition of force of habit is the kinaesthetic awareness of the muscular preparation that precedes action. It is becoming alert to the unconscious nature of postural preparation for an habitual action – a preparation is, at least initially, difficult to sense. Only when it is sensed, is the first step made toward preventing the habitual action. To paraphrase Socrates, it is better to do wrong knowingly than to do so unknowingly, because only the knowledge of wrong action can lead to stopping it. In this case, the experiential knowledge of an action in the muscles is more useful than the intellectual knowledge of a muscular action. *Recognition of faulty sensory appreciation* refers to the fact that what one senses may often be incorrect - that what feels right may be quite wrong, and, conversely, what feels wrong may be right. Much of the work in the Alexander Technique is correcting faulty kinaesthesia.

The term *Inhibition* is sometimes used by Alexander in the sense that physiologists use it, that is, the opposite of excitation when referring to the muscles. It is the action of *un*-contracting a muscle, of reducing postural tone in the muscle to allow it to lengthen. But in Alexander parlance, it also refers to stopping, to deciding not to do the thing we wish to do, so that we may decide on new means (*means-whereby*, in Alexander terms) for achieving the same ends. He calls *inhibition*: “[...] *the act of refusing to respond* to the primary desire to gain an end” (1986, p. 110).

Direction refers to the messages that are consciously sent to prevent fixity and to encourage length and volume throughout the body. There is a verbal sequence that is taught in the Alexander Technique as a reminder of the hierarchical nature of *direction* which is: free the neck, to allow the head go forward and up, to allow the back lengthen and widen, thus proceeding out to the hands and feet. The first direction is continued while the next is given, the first two continued as the third is given, the first three continued as the fourth is given and so on. These directions are intracorporeal as well as spatial, meaning that one directs the parts of the body away from each other to allow muscle freedom and lengthening. But one also considers the direction of the body in relation to the force of gravity, and in relation to

air pressure and to the surrounding environment, so we may have “up along the spine” but also “up in relation to gravity”. The neuro-muscular flow of freeing and lengthening messages from the brain to the muscles is referred to as *direction*. So we might say that someone has good *direction*. If one successfully, consciously *directs* the neck to be free, one is, in fact, *inhibiting*; if one is *inhibiting*, one has begun the process of *directing*, but will need to go further to establish a new use of the self which can be sustained in activity.

Primary control is the term Alexander used to describe the core postural reflex system that involves the manner in which the head relates to the spine. In vertebrates, movements are initiated by subtle changes of the head’s condition, which serve to prepare the muscular system towards a particular action. When the poise of the head upon the spine is disrupted by excess muscular contraction, the function of the whole postural system will be less than optimal. Because neuro-muscular action related to most movement begins with a change in the head-neck-back relationship, Alexander (1985) called this system the *primary control*.

Another term that needs defining is *end-gaining*. Jones (1976) defined *end-gaining* as follows: “An orientation toward an end to be achieved, which distracts the person from the steps (*means-whereby*) needed to achieve the end. An *end-gaining* orientation prevents the application of conscious control and may lead to uncoordinated use” (p. 194).

Alexander’s discoveries came out of years of self-observation. He set up three mirrors so that he could easily observe himself as he attempted to speak. He was soon able to perceive what he had been unable to feel - that as he prepared to speak, he was hardening certain muscles and that this hardening was interfering with the manner in which his head was poised in relation to his neck and back. He would later refer to the head-neck-back relationship as the *primary control*, as he was able to observe that any interference with this relationship led to poor overall use of the *self*, and conversely, that the ability to direct this *primary control* to function optimally often led to improvement in many conditions. “When the Primary Control is interfered with, it can interfere with other reflexes throughout the body and cause a lack of co-ordination and balance” (Alexander, 1984, p. 33). He realised that his sensory awareness was faulty, that is, he could see the misuse, but could not feel it. When he attempted to

directly prevent the misuse, he soon discovered that he could not, that the pattern was unconsciously elicited in response to the stimulus to speak (*recognition of force of habit*) and that if he wished to alter it, that he must first decide not to speak (*inhibition*). Alexander needed to inhibit his immediate response to his desire to speak. He could then work on projecting the directions that would enable him to maintain what he saw as the optimal head-neck-back relationship. He persisted and was eventually able to continue projecting these directions and to then proceed step-by-step to project the directions that would lead to speaking without his habitual misuse.

Alexander writes of how he needed to spend weeks in a state of what he called *non-doing* in which he did not attempt to carry out any activity, but simply worked on projecting the *directions* which would allow for the optimal functioning of the *primary control*. That is, he wanted to stop all doing to allow his innate reflexes to function properly, and he wanted to find a method of conscious *direction* which would enable him eventually to do something without preparing himself in an habitual manner. This *non-doing* process slowly brings unwanted and unconscious effort to the surface of awareness, allows one to stop the doing, and gives one a clear perceptual canvas on which habitual responses will register more clearly.

According to Alexander (1986) “*Re-education is not a process of adding something but of restoring something*. It was to meet the need of restoring actual conditions of use and functioning which had been previously experienced and afterwards lost, that my technique for the re-education and the use of the self was evolved” (p. 190). Alexander discovered what many of us have observed: that we lose, through the acquisition of habit, the poise that we had as children.

Among the many definitions of the technique, Jones (1976) suggests the following: “[...] a method (a ‘means-whereby’) for expanding consciousness to take in inhibition as well as excitation (‘not-doing’ as well as ‘doing’) and thus obtain a better integration of the reflex and voluntary elements in a response pattern” (p. 2). Later, looking at the technique from a slightly different perspective, he described it as: “[...] an expansion of the field of

consciousness (or of ‘attention’ if you object to the term ‘consciousness’) in space and time so that you are taking in both yourself and your environment, both the present moment and the next. It is a unified field organised around the self as center” (p. 192).

Prominent doctors and scientists of Alexander’s time, including two Nobel Prize winners, Sherrington (Jones, 1997) and Tinbergen (1974), enthusiastically endorsed the technique. The research done by contemporary scientists, including Berthoz (1999), Coghill (1929), and Magnus (1925), supports what Alexander observed: that the manner in which the head leads the spine in vertebrates constitutes a central reflex upon which other reflexes depend for their optimal functioning. However, Alexander’s great and unique contribution is his method of teaching conscious control of this mechanism, a method for change through the recognition of psychophysical unity.

Today, the Alexander Technique is taught in various settings all over the world. For the most part, it is taught privately. The Society for Teachers of the Alexander Technique (STAT) and its affiliates (for example CANSTAT, in Canada; AmSAT, in the United States; AUSTAT, in Australia; etc.) have established professional guidelines for practitioners and for the training of teachers. Currently, a minimum of 1600 hours training, spread out over a period of three years, is required for certification.

Considering that it has been in use for a century, the dearth of scientific studies using the Alexander Technique may seem surprising, but Alexander himself always resisted the idea that improvement in specific areas of functioning was a way of measuring the efficacy of the technique. He felt that improvement in athletic performance, for example, could result from any number of causes, but that a change in the use of the self which might indirectly lead to such improvement was an example of a profound change in thinking, one that could not be accomplished by direct action – through exercise, for example. What seemed important to Alexander was choice, the ability to decide not to do the habitual, the ability of man to use thinking to avoid being an automaton.

Jones (1976) reports that, at one point, Dewey urged Alexander to submit his method to scientific research, as Dewey felt that it was the only way that those who had not directly experienced the work could be encouraged to consider its benefits. He went so far as to arrange a commitment from the Rockefeller Foundation in New York to research the technique, but Alexander, always unwilling to give up direct control of anything regarding his work, undermined the project.

However, some of Alexander's trainees, and third and fourth generation teachers, have subjected his technique to scientific study. Prominent among these researchers were two who had trained with Alexander, Wilfred Barlow and Frank Pierce Jones. Barlow (1973), who was a medical doctor, felt the need to conduct scientific studies on the technique – perhaps to defend the method to his medical colleagues – and had the resources to do so. Jones (1976), a literature professor and a protégé of John Dewey, was fortunate to obtain the use of laboratories and equipment at Tufts University, and focused his research on the mechanics of body movement. He felt, as had Barlow, that the world of science and medicine needed to be convinced of the usefulness of the Alexander Technique. I will cover these and others in the next section.

It must be remembered that Alexander was first an actor, and his technique has been known and used for decades in the world of the performing arts, where, for many, its effectiveness is unquestioned. The Alexander community's insistence on classifying the technique as an educational method, rather than a therapy, has probably led it away from the medical model of a search for quantifiable results. The STAT associated societies forbid its members from making any health claims for the technique. Because, although we might see improvements in respiration, for example, in those who study the Alexander Technique, this does not mean that the technique constitutes a treatment for breathing problems, only that certain individuals may have improved functioning when they cease certain acquired behaviors that may have contributed to poor respiratory coordination.

1.3 Literature on the Alexander Technique

Numerous books have been written on the Alexander Technique from the perspectives of philosophy, psychology, theology, performing arts, sociology, education, physiotherapy, and sports. As a large part of the literature on the subject is mostly descriptive in nature, I have opted to divide this section by authors, rather than by subject. I have chosen to present eight authors who have relevance to the field of study. I include two qualitative studies (Kaplan, 1994 and Krim, 1993) that are most appropriate to my field of research.

1:31 Lulie Westfeldt and Wifred Barlow

Both of these authors trained with Alexander himself, although each was later to become estranged from him. Their first-hand experience of Alexander's work makes them valuable contributors to the literature on his technique. Lulie Westfeldt, a graduate of Alexander's first training course for teachers, was one of the first Alexander teachers, apart from F.M. and his brother, A.R. Alexander⁴, to teach in New York City. In her book, *F. Matthias Alexander: the Man and His Work* (1986), she sketches a portrait of Alexander, explains the principles of his technique, and describes her ten years of lessons and professional training with him. In relating her own teaching experiences, she presents several case histories, some of them of children. The most interesting is her own history, which recalls her childhood polio and subsequent surgeries, which left her increasingly crippled, and the remarkable changes she underwent while studying the technique.

The changes that took place with me during my first two months of lessons... were greater ease and endurance in standing and walking, a straighter, longer back (my height increased one inch in those two months), lower, wider shoulders, no more hunching up of the left shoulder with every movement, my whole frame coming into a more normal alignment, muscular development of my calves (particularly the right calf), a different alignment of my arms in their sockets. (p. 89)

⁴ Albert Redden Alexander, who was five years younger than F.M., learned the technique from his brother and worked with him for six years in Australia before he followed F.M. to London. He taught in London and in the United States until his death in 1947.

She goes on to relate a remarkable experience, which occurred during her second year of Alexander training:

Then I realized that my right heel was touching the floor. It was no longer up in the air but flat on the floor like the left one. It had not touched the floor for upwards of twenty years; shortly after the operation that had immobilized the right ankle, my right heel had drawn up and been unable to touch the floor. The sensation became more and more delightful. Almost at once, my balance became much more secure. (p. 90)

Wilfred Barlow, a medical doctor who trained under Alexander, wrote extensively on the technique, and undertook several studies to evaluate the technique. One quantitative study worth noting uses before and after photographs taken against a grid to evaluate changes in posture in subjects who had lessons in the Alexander Technique, compared with those who did exercises designed to improve posture (Barlow,1956). The group who had Alexander lessons were music students from the Royal College of Music. This group showed significant improvement in postural faults following the lessons, which correlated with improvement in singing and acting, as reported by their teachers at the college. The exercise group showed no significant change. In his book, *The Alexander Principle* (1973), Barlow devotes a chapter to the medical benefits of the technique, stating that it could be helpful for stress-related problems, including ulcers and digestive disorders, heart disease and high-blood pressure, asthma and chronic bronchitis, epilepsy, migraine, and certain sexual disorders. These are claims not usually made by the Alexander community, as the ability to diagnose and treat specific ailments certainly falls outside of the purview of the Alexander teacher, but it is worth noting that a doctor with professional training in the Alexander technique witnessed such benefits in his practice.

1.32 Frank Pierce Jones

In the mid 1950's, Frank Pierce Jones, a former professor of literature at Brown University who had studied the Alexander Technique with the Alexander brothers, gained access to the Institute for Applied Experimental Psychology at Tufts University where he used scientific methods, including photographic and electromyographic studies, to demonstrate the efficacy of the Alexander Technique. In all, he published more than 30 papers on the technique.

Krim (1993) wrote: “Although most of Jones’ research was quantitative in design, his use of subjective experience data [...] suggests a potential value to a qualitative approach” (p. 25). The results of Jones’ studies, published between 1959 and 1971 in journals on psychology, neurology and physiology, are included in his book, *Body Awareness in Action*, which was published in 1976 after his death. In it, Jones presents a very clear description of Alexander’s work, how it was developed, and he then goes on to describe his own experience, followed by his studies. Jones manages to describe Alexander’s work in the language of modern science. He offers several new definitions of the technique, among them: “A method for changing stereotyped response patterns by the inhibition of certain postural sets” (Jones, 1965, p. 1).

In much of Jones’ research, subjects carried out simple actions, such as moving in or out of a chair, walking, or lifting an arm. Subjects would carry out an action in their usual manner, and would then perform the same action under the guidance of an Alexander Technique practitioner. Jones used electromyography, stroboscopic photography, stress gauge platforms, and subject interviews to assess the difference between an action carried out habitually and one carried out when the practitioner was assisting the subject in maintaining an improved head-neck-back relationship. Writes Jones (1976):

Subjects regularly report that the movements are easier and smoother and that they feel lighter and taller while they are doing them. ‘More ease and lightness,’ ‘a feeling of ease, of competence – very different from relaxation,’ ‘a greater degree of ease and consequent pleasure,’ are expressions that subjects have used to describe the experience. (p. 5 – 6)

He recorded change in how subjects moved from sitting to standing using several devices, including a strain-gauge platform:

A direct measure of the difference in force exerted by the subject in the habitual and experimental movement was provided by a strain-gauge force platform. The force platform is a device for recording shifts in force over time on a polygraph. It consists of a wooden board attached to an aluminium tube on which strain gauges have been mounted (O’Leary, 1970). The polygraph pen is deflected in an amount proportional to the force applied by the subject. In one study the subject first sat on a high stool with his feet on the force platform. [...] It can be seen that guidance, by eliminating the postural set from the movement, subtracted approximately twenty-five pounds of force which the subject ordinarily used to get the movement started. Similar records have been obtained for the beginning of walking and for climbing stairs. (p. 125-6)

Jones also recorded muscular action using electromyography to measure changes in the electrical potential of several muscles (sternomastoid, trapezuis, latissimus dorsi, pectoralis major, rectus abdominus, etc.) showing the comparative effort involved in habitual versus guided movement from most comfortable to erect sitting posture (p. 117-8). The results indicated that subjects tended to use excessive force, even in simple movements, and that this habitual level of effort could be diminished through repeated guidance using the Alexander Technique.

In his book, Jones also describes the relationship between Alexander and Dewey, one that seems to have aided both men in formulating and furthering their systems. Dewey, who studied the Alexander Technique with Alexander himself for 35 years, wrote introductions to three of Alexander's books, *The Use of the Self* (1984), *Constructive Conscious Control* (1985) and *Man's Supreme Inheritance* (1988). Dewey (1957) referred to Alexander's work in his writing on education and philosophy.

1.33 John Austin and Pearl Ausubel

In Austin and Ausubel's 1992 study, "Enhanced respiratory muscular function in normal adults after lessons in proprioceptive musculoskeletal education without exercises", healthy volunteer subjects were given 20 lessons in the Alexander Technique at weekly intervals. Tests to measure respiratory function were given before and after each course of lessons. A control group that received no Alexander Technique lessons had respiratory function assessed according to the same schedule. The Alexander group recorded significant improvements in measurements of peak expiratory flow, maximal boundary ventilation, maximal inspiratory mouth pressure, and maximal expiratory mouth pressure. These results confirm the subjects' reports of greater respiratory ease following Alexander study.

1.34 Chloë Stallibrass, Peta Sissons and C. Chalmers

A recently completed study by Stallibrass et al (2002), looks at the effects of Alexander lessons on subjects with idiopathic Parkinson's disease. This randomized controlled trial used three groups, one receiving 24 lessons in the Alexander Technique, one receiving 24 massage sessions, and one receiving no additional treatment. All subjects received conventional treatment, i.e., medication. Outcomes were assessed using the Self-assessment Parkinson's Disease Disability Scale (SPDDS). The results show that the Alexander Technique group improved compared with the no-intervention group, and that this improvement is maintained at the end of a six month follow-up. Some areas of specific functional improvement are: walking, speech, energy, reduced tremor, reduced rigidity or muscle tension. Comparative change in the massage group and the no additional intervention group, as measured on the SPDDS, shows no statistical significance in the differences, either immediately post-intervention or at the six-month follow-up. The researchers list what they call *clinical messages* as:

- A relatively small number of lessons in the Alexander Technique leads to sustained benefits in patients with idiopathic Parkinson's disease.
- The sustained benefits are mainly due to acquiring the ability to apply Alexander Technique skills in daily life.
- Touch and attention alone do not lead to sustained benefits. (p. 715)

1.35 Anne Matthews

The Alexander Technique is attracting more and more interest in academic circles, as evidenced by the dissertations which I will now consider. Matthews' 1984 master's thesis, *Implications for Education in the Work of F.M. Alexander: An Exploratory Project in a Public School Classroom*, is worth noting here. The thesis is basically a journal of her experience teaching the Alexander Technique in a group setting to six and seven year old school children. While it is subjective in nature, she makes use of photos, videotape, and direct quotations from the children, as well as the comments of the children's school teacher, who had been studying the technique privately with Matthews.

Matthews worked with the children while they were attending to their everyday school curriculum. Using hands-on guidance, she helped the children to become more aware of themselves, and she encouraged them to apply this awareness of themselves in their activities throughout the day. Many of the children felt that, subsequent to the work with Matthews, they were able to apply some of what they learned to other activities. Matthews concludes: “[...] if the teacher can be instrumental in strengthening the child’s awareness of self, or in guiding it back on track when it seems to be faltering, something immensely important will have been communicated to the child” (p. 65). (Similar conclusions are found in Kaplan (1994), which I will later describe.)

Most of the recent dissertations written on the Alexander Technique explore its relevance to acting and music from an educational or aesthetic point of view – rather than from a bio-medical perspective, such as that taken by Stalibrass (2002) or Austin and Ausabel (1992). Examples are: Chabora (1994), Holm (1997), Knaub (1999), Kaplan (1994), McCulloch (1996), Rogers (1999), Tabish (1995), Tillman (1999), and Wabich (1992). This is not surprising, considering the fact that Alexander was himself an actor and that the technique is taught at numerous schools for the performing arts, including: The American Conservatory Theatre, The Juilliard School, The London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art, The National Theatre School, in Montréal, New York University and many of other performing centers and training schools around the world.

1.36 Iris Kaplan and Don Krim

The following two researchers, Kaplan (1994) and Krim (1993), are of particular importance to me because of (1) their focus on experience; (2) the qualitative nature of their research; (3) the in depth interviews conducted; and (4) the analysis through case-study format. These methodologies are similar to those which I have chosen to follow, thus, I will briefly hint at them at this point.

The purpose of Kaplan's 1994 study is "[...] to explore, describe and compare the experiences of six pianists who had studied the Alexander Technique, and how they incorporated it into their piano playing" (p. 173). The study uses a qualitative approach, using data gleaned from open-ended, in-depth interviews with pianists who had previously studied the Alexander Technique. "The pianists in this study were motivated by pain, discomfort, tension and disillusionment with piano teachers to study the Alexander Technique" (p. 174). Six were selected through purposive sampling, based on knowledge and experience of piano-playing combined with Alexander study. The participants, all of whom resided in the United States, vary in musical background, and in Alexander Technique experience. The participants describe their experiences related to the study of the Alexander Technique, each with a different teacher. Kaplan mentions that the variety provides a wide range of experience, which was her intent from the outset.

Kaplan does not give precise information about the time frame of her study, but states that two or three interviews were conducted with each participant. In the first interview, the participants were asked to select a piece of music which they would work on, then play and discuss in subsequent interviews. My interviews follow a format similar to those of Kaplan, that is, three open-ended, in-depth interviews over a period of several months. The first interview took place shortly before the commencement of Alexander Technique lessons, the second, in the sixth week of the study, and the third, closely following the end of their 10 weeks of Alexander study. Although I did not ask the dancers in my study to perform for me, I posed questions that relate specifically to their current repertoire, as they are from the same company, although with varied backgrounds and differing levels of ability. I queried them about what motivated them to seek out the Alexander Technique (or to participate in this study), and what they hope to gain from it.

Kaplan concludes that "the Alexander Technique is not only useful for dealing with problems of pain, discomfort, tension and stage fright, but that it provides a model of use for the prevention of injuries" (p. 192). Although she is not the Alexander Technique practitioner in her study, she notes the effect of her study on her own teaching. Her role as a teacher of the Alexander Technique expanded from simply teaching the principles of the technique to

analyzing and examining the subjects' histories, with a view toward understanding the origins of their problems. Matthews (1984) mentions the close interaction between teacher and student, but the practitioner's experience during the teaching process is mostly absent from the studies I have read using the Alexander Technique, with the exception of Oliver (1994), which I will describe later. I will include the practitioner's viewpoint in my study. Although I am myself an Alexander practitioner, I will not teach the dancer/participants in my study, as I prefer to devote my attention to the collection and analysis of data.

Kaplan finds that discovering why students might be playing in a manner harmful to them, rather than simply trying to correct what they were doing wrong, can be helpful in seeking a solution to their problems. She also notes that her qualitative study provides her with some important suggestions to take into account in her own teaching, for example, "Try to understand a situation or student's behaviour by examining it from many angles and looking for all possible explanations, teaching students to enjoy the process without focussing so much on the outcomes, and look beyond the subject matter to find a clue to a student's success" (p. 196).

Krim's (1993) study looks at athletes who had studied the Alexander Technique. "The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and the perceived effectiveness of the Alexander Technique in relationship to enhancing athletic performance" (p. 3). The participants, from England, Canada and the United States, were chosen from their experience in competitive sports and their knowledge gleaned from studying the Alexander Technique long enough to be able to relate their experience to their respective sports. "The five athletes participating had varying amounts of experience studying the technique. Their relative experience with the Alexander Technique was on a continuum, from private study only, to being a trainee in a teacher training course, to being a qualified teacher of the Alexander Technique" (p. 30).

Data collection consisted of two semi-structured interviews of 90 minutes each, which were held on the phone with each participant. From the interviews Krim determined two categories of phenomena, experiential and effect, each of which he divided into

subcategories. Under the experiential category, he places awareness, wholeness, and control, mastery and confidence. He divides the effect category into stress management, injury prevention and recovery, and learning. Based on his own experience with the technique, and knowledge of previous studies, the researcher had certain expectations. While he anticipated positive reports regarding “[...] increased kinaesthetic awareness, greater ease of movement, reduced stress, and more of a sense of being present, in the moment” (p. 160), the experience of wholeness and a sense of allowing and letting go were more vivid in the participants’ experience than was anticipated. Krim (1993) notes that “the sense of control and mastery, the increased learning and the emphasis on injury prevention and recovery offered further evidence of the depth of the experience that the athletes reported” (p. 160). The interviews with the five athletes are rich in detail regarding the aforementioned categories of experience. Interestingly, I would say that four of these elements – wholeness, allowing and letting go, control and mastery, injury prevention and recovery – are also crucial to dance.

It is interesting to note that very little is reported in this study in regard to the everyday activities of the subjects, an area where one could expect to see effects before integration of the technique into a specific sport could be seen. This is perhaps because the interviews specifically target athletic performance, and do not query the subjects in a manner that elicits reportage of everyday effects. Although these effects are not central to the goal of my study, I think that effects on everyday activities might precede and anticipate effects seen in dance. With this in mind, I opened my interview format to permit the inclusion of data from everyday experience.

Before going on to the next section, I want to point out that, while the Alexander Technique is not overtly therapeutic, and does not deal directly with particular health problems, the greater self-awareness one acquires through its study encourages behavioural changes that might lead to improved functioning or to improved health. Reducing misplaced and unnecessary effort could have an effect on overall health. For example, consider the dancer who cannot raise his arms without engaging a panoply of unneeded muscular action. Malfunction and eventually injury could result. Good muscular organisation is of the utmost importance in the career of a dancer, not just to reduce injuries, but to insure the dancer

reaches his expressive potential, as well. The dancer who, due to thoracic rigidity, has difficulty breathing lacks endurance, and may appear strained or rigid when an easy quality is called for.

The dominant message that emerges from the literature is Alexander's basic tenet that the way the self is used affects its functioning.

1.4 The Alexander Technique and dance

A few authors with expertise in both somatics and dance write on pedagogical approaches that have served to deepen the understanding of the relationship between the two fields (Eddy, 2000, 2002; Fortin, 1992, 1996, 1998; Green, 1999, 2000; Goddard, 1995 and Rouquet, 1985, 1991). Although these works are important, I will focus on work specifically related to the Alexander Technique and dance.

Huxley, Leach and Stevens (1995) divide writing on the Alexander Technique into two periods. The first, from 1888 to 1941, encompasses the publication of Alexander's four books. This period, they point out, coincides with attempts to formulate theories of modern dance and movement, notably by Duncan, Dalcroze, Laban, Mensendieck, Meyerhold, Schlemmer, and Todd. During this period, according to Louppe (1997), "Discomfort at seeing the body, its knowledge, its poetry, submitted to some mechanical or purely biological vision (or at least subjected to modes of representation not far from determinism) is without doubt what drove one group of dance specialists to search for an alternative via the liberation of body-self from all dependence on causality."⁵ (p. 77). The second period is from 1960 to the present, during which those trained by Alexander published their interpretations of his work. It is during this period that writing on the Alexander Technique in relation to dance is first seen. Incidentally, I would add that this second period coincides with a period in

⁵ "L'inquiétude de voir la corporéité, ses savoirs, sa poétique, soumis à quelque vision mécanique ou purement biologique (ou du moins cernés en des modes de représentation proches du déterminisme) est sans doute ce qui a conduit toute une aile de la pensée en danse à chercher des sorties vers une libération du soi-corps de toute dépendance causaliste."

modern dance in which all possible movement becomes dance vocabulary, a period that in the United States began with the Judson Church group, and, according to Vaslaslakis Tembeck (in conversation, January 13, 2003), had its parallel in Europe in *Expression corporelle* or *Mouvement expressif*.

In the mid-sixties, the first articles relating the study of the Alexander Technique to dance began to appear. In 1967, an article by Leibowitz and Caplan appeared in *Dance Scope*. Since then, several articles have appeared in *Contact Quarterly*, *Kinesiology and Medicine for Dance*, and *Impulse* on the applicability of the Alexander Technique to dance training and performing, by such dance teachers/Alexander practitioners as Bluethenthal (1996), Batson (1999), Leach and Stevens (1996), and Richmond (1994), to name a few.

I divide into three sections the following examination of the literature on the Alexander Technique as it relates to dance. The first covers studies and articles that relate the Alexander Technique to the health of the dancer. The second covers literature that describes the technique and relates some of its concepts to dance. The third section is composed of theses or dissertations written on the Alexander Technique as it relates to dance.

1.41 The Alexander Technique and the health of the dancer

I have found three authors who write specifically on how the study of the Alexander Technique relates to the health of dancers: Oliver (1993), White (1993), and Bral (1999).

White (1993), in a short article entitled *Ballet and the Alexander Technique*, briefly describes the technique, then presents three problems encountered in the teaching of ballet with possible Alexander Technique solutions. From her experience as a soloist with Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet, as a graduate of the Royal Academy of Dancing, as well as a certified Alexander Technique practitioner, she relates examples of injuries and malfunctions that were alleviated by the application of certain Alexander Technique principles. The first problem she addresses is excessive tension, which she relates to the competitive environment

in which ballet is taught. She states that the ultimate goal in many classes is “getting it right” at any cost, and that the resultant tension at the barre is not managed by the dancer or by the teacher. In Alexander’s terminology, this is *end-gaining* – where focusing on the goal or result obscures the process or (again, in Alexander’s language) the *means-whereby*.

The second health problem is faulty breathing, which the author sites as a cause of depression. The problems encountered by the author both as student performer and as teacher were that:

[...] the dancer breathes mainly in the upper chest, and tension around the vertebrae on which the ribs articulate prevents ease of breathing. The balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the blood is disturbed by the upper chest breathing, leading to feelings of anxiety which cause depression. (p. 47)

She points out that freedom in the ribcage which allows the restoration of good reflexive breathing can best be accomplished through Alexander’s basic directions: free the neck, to allow the head go forwards and up, to allow the back to lengthen and widen. This represents part of a process which effectively leads to a freer overall self.

Finally, White writes about joint injury relating to the dynamic muscular actions of tension/relaxation, for example, in the activity of jumping. She refers to use of the self, and points out how learning good use, as described by Alexander, can prevent the young student (specifically in ballet, because training usually happens during a crucial growth period) from serious injury and, in the long-term, chronic conditions such as arthritis.

Oliver (1993) writes that the purpose of her study with a dancer “[...] was to determine the usefulness of the Alexander Technique in facilitating a dancer’s return to full, pain free dance activity following a history of low-back strain and recurring dysfunction” (p. 80). Through a case study format, the researcher describes her work with a dancer with a history of low-back injury that became chronic. The dancer met with Oliver two times a week during a two-month period for Alexander Technique lessons, and kept a journal. Oliver describes how the dancer had become protective of the injured area, using excessive tension in order not to mobilize the area, “[...] which seems to have contributed to an extreme lack of mobility in the lumbrosacral spine. The tensional pattern had become so habitual that she was not aware

of it” (p. 84-85). Oliver writes: “In the course of the lessons, I felt that several positive changes took place. For the first time, CP [the dancer] realized that she could not treat her back as isolated from the rest of her body and became increasingly aware of subtle interrelationships” (p. 86). Oliver describes her work with the dancer, following a traditional Alexander Technique approach, including chair and table work [see appendix D]. She would follow up this work with other standard Alexander procedures, such as “monkey” (a term used to describe Alexander’s position of mechanical advantage), squatting, and hands on the back of the chair, a procedure which “[...] emphasized the maintenance of the shoulder blades on the back with the arms extended and lightly grasping the back of the chair” (p. 83). She worked on relating these procedures to specific dance movements, for example, plié and port de bras.

During the period of study of the Alexander Technique, CP’s dance teachers increasingly noted moments of breakthrough that occurred when she was relaxed and unconcerned with their judgement of her dancing. Oliver reports that, in her journal, CP noted that “[...] her balance had improved noticeably and that one teacher had mentioned how much more ease there seemed to be in her movement” (p. 86).

In her conclusion, Oliver writes:

In our work together, the gradual release of tension in the abdominal muscles enhanced C.P.’s performance in basic dance movements such as plié and port de bras which we repeated regularly. Ultimately, I think the most important outcome was C.P.’s heightened awareness of the impact that use can have on functioning. By learning to examine that interplay in her own movement, I felt she developed a tool that could continue to facilitate change and improvement throughout her career. (p. 86-87)

Bral (1998) wrote his master’s thesis on the Alexander Technique and dance. While it is more of a reflection on the subject and not an empirical study, per se, he devotes a small portion of the thesis to dance injury and prevention through the Alexander Technique. Bral quotes Goddard’s (1994) contention that dance injury is often due to errors in technique and

coordination in repetitive movement, rather than to sudden impact, as in athletic injury.⁶ Bral (1998) states that extreme fatigue, brought about by over-training, often causes a deterioration in the level of functioning, which can lead to injury, because it leads to a diminished state of awareness, in which protective reflexes function more slowly. Finally, he relates that professional dancers who had surgery (mostly knee surgery), and subsequently had Alexander Technique lessons with him, improved noticeably, whereas they had not improved with conventional physiotherapy. The problem, according to Bral, is that the re-education presented to the dancer in physiotherapy is not designed for dancers, but was created with the athlete in mind. I will describe Bral's thesis in more detail in the last section, in which are described dissertations and theses written on the Alexander Technique and dance.

1.42 The Alexander Technique and dance training

Here, I will examine literature on the Alexander Technique as it relates to dance training. In an article entitled *The Alexander Technique and Dance Training*, Richmond (1994) explains the principles of the Alexander Technique and how they can be related to dance training. She deals particularly with the importance of the dancer's *use* and with the goal-oriented approach often taken in dance instruction (what Alexander called *end-gaining*). As she sees it, dance students, and, for that matter, dance technique, are too often geared towards results, without sufficient attention being paid to what Alexander (1986) called the *means-whereby*, a view also expressed by Batson (1990, 1994), Oliver (1994) and White (1993). According to Richmond (1994):

(...) the overriding focus on results, or ends, cultivates stress and causes difficulties rather than solving them. In the competitive atmosphere of the dance studio it is easy for an individual to become so obsessed with the end of technique that he or she cannot think rationally about the consequences of particular ways of working. Alexander called this attitude *end-gaining*. (p. 30)

⁶ "Comme l'on souligné nombre de chercheurs [...], très peu de pathologies liées à la danse sont dues à des accidents traumatiques exogènes, mais bien à des erreurs techniques et de coordination acquises répétées jusqu'à créer une gêne chronique" (Goddard, 1994, p. 73).

She contrasts this with the teaching of the Alexander Technique, in which the individual should be enabled to become responsible for his own use through the steady development of self-awareness, and through the application of the principles of *inhibition* and *direction*, allowing him to place the process in the foreground of awareness, and the results in the background. She presents the importance of Alexander's concept of the *primary control* in the dancer's ability to respond to the demands of his profession:

The individual's 'use' of fundamental habits of neuromuscular organisation in activity precedes and either supports or interferes with the capacity for coordination. A dancer with poor use is not only performing the activity, but is also expending unnecessary energy and misdirected attention in muscular bracing which interferes with the performance of the activity. (p. 24)

Bluethenthal (1996) also writes of the dancer's *use*, when she describes how a dancer may communicate good or bad use to the audience. She writes that habits that are cultivated during training,

(...) are in large part unintended and have great physical and psychic impact. (...) these habits are conveyed to the audience through movement that alters the nature and meaning of her/his communication. (...) Conversely, a dancer who is habitually rigid in the chest and shoulders will convey similar anxiety to the audience either visually or viscerally. (p. 76)

In a paper entitled *Breaking down the barrier of habit: an interdisciplinary perspective of the ideas of F.M. Alexander and the theory and practice of dance*, Huxley, Leach and Stevens (1995) address the concepts of habit and use in dance: "[...] we take Alexander's consideration of habit as our focus and we argue for a re-appraisal of his ideas and Technique as applied to current dance practice. [...] We then identify habit as a limiting factor in dance training and education" (p. 155).

The authors write that "Skills, such as posture and coordination, which are fundamental to dance, have been learned or acquired from an early age and in accordance with an established quality of use" (p. 165). They state that many fundamental skills related to basic actions, such as sitting, are learned before we are old enough to be instructed to avoid misuse.

Over the last 20 years or so, the dance curriculum has expanded to include training in different technical styles as well as somatic work and alternative movement systems and the study of anatomy. According to the authors, if these techniques or approaches fail to “[...] recognise the extent and influence of the individual’s underlying manner of use and have an effective way of reaching it, then the fundamental, habitual modes of thought and action established over many years, continue to be brought to bear” (p. 163).

The authors suggest that habits limit the potential of both the dancer and the choreographer because they create boundaries. “Any style, choreographic or technical, ossified into habitual solutions will mean that new ideas will tend to be drawn into the orbit of the old and consequently stifled” (p. 165).

So the problem is not merely that a dancer, having mastered a set of appropriate technical responses, has difficulty letting them go to master a different technique; it is that the instrument, her own self, is habitual. Any technique will be built on the foundations of an habitual, overall manner of use – a constant factor in all our activity. (p. 162)

Leach and Stevens (1996), in another paper presented at the Congress in Research on Dance at the University of North Carolina, relate their practical experience of the application of the Alexander Technique to dance. They are again particularly concerned with habit in performance. One common misunderstanding in dance performance, according to the writers is that:

It is frequently said, not least by dance students, that unless technique in performance becomes so habitual that they do not have to think about it, they cannot give their attention to artistic and interpretative matters. Statements like these immediately reveal that the speaker belongs to the school which believes that mental and spiritual events can be separated in practice for mechanical ones. (p. 117)

I think that quality of expression in performance is difficult to achieve if the dancer is on automatic pilot. Freeing ourselves from unwanted habits demands sustained consciousness of the moment. How often do we hear in dance class, “Don’t think, just do it!”

1.43 Theses and dissertations

Finally, I will look at the writing of three authors who have written theses or dissertations on the subject of dance and the Alexander Technique: Oliver (1994), Bral (1998), and Harris (1998).

In the introduction to her doctoral thesis entitled: *Toward mind/body unity: seeking the deeper promise of dance education*, Oliver (1994) writes:

In this work I explore the cultural construction of dance and the possible revisioning of dance practice suggested by a metaphoric reading of my experience within dance and the Alexander Technique. I strive throughout to interrogate my personal beliefs and to negotiate a delicate middle way between the polar opposites that characterize Western epistemology (p. iii).

In her thesis Oliver presents what she calls three histories. The first is the history of her experience in the dance world, detailing the story of her dance career, her motivation, inspiration, her struggle, and her subsequent abandonment and rediscovery of dance. She summarizes her 25 years of experience in dance as student, dancer and teacher, the last 15 of which included the study and teaching of the Alexander Technique. She writes:

The Alexander Technique enabled me to stop grasping for the external ideal as if it were something that could be bought or won. It turned me inward toward the resources within my self. After a steady diet of gross motor activity, it introduced me to fine-tuning and subtle thought processes that influenced energy flow. It gave me choices that opened the path leading away from victimization and service to dance. I discovered the power of a coaxing rather than driving spirit in my self-use. For the first time, I was studying my own way and allowing my self to be. (p. 71)

She also recalls her struggle with academia (her studies and research) as being similar to the struggle she had experienced in dance prior to the discovery of the Alexander Technique. The studies that she undertook early in her career were quantitative in design, but she states that she grew increasingly dissatisfied with the absence of subjectivity in these studies. She writes that she found the “[...] exposure to research methods within the interpretive qualitative/naturalistic paradigm and the philosophical challenge to positivism posed by that perspective particularly influential in my thinking” (p. 21). She searched for something that would expose her subjective sense and help her to “[...] construct an experimental format

that would both contribute to and challenge the existing framework as well as inform dance learning” (p. 21). In the end she states that: “My project in dance and in scholarship is the ever deepening inquiry into subjectivity and the metamorphosis of subjectivity through experience” (p. 32).

The second history is an elaboration of the cultural and societal forces that have shaped the art of dance. Here, she sets out to “[...] explore the authoritarian practices in dance and examine how that system reproduces itself” (p. 110). She writes that “An alternative to the authoritarian tradition would be to view education as a collaboration between teacher and student” (p. 117). Oliver cites Hanstein (1990), who suggests “[...] a curricular approach that is inquiry-oriented rather than focused on role learning and replication” (p. 57). In this system, “The student’s perspective would be encouraged and respected with the teacher acting as guide and facilitator” (p. 117). Oliver states that, in dance,

We try to define an art that should cherish the ephemeral. We codify, specify, and reform the idiosyncratic in an effort to name and own our enterprise; yet we laud the renegade. We make the almost military order of demonstration/imitation the predominant classroom strategy. How can we move forward if we do not continually re-evaluate our relationship to the past, if we do not interrogate the cultural forces that shape our practices? (p. 149)

The third history comprises the development of the Alexander Technique and her experience learning and teaching it. Within this third history, Oliver (1994) presents four case studies, carried out in what she calls the “naturalistic tradition” (p. 28). She writes that, prior to commencing the study, she had a year-long interaction with the four participant dancers as they were students in a course she taught on the technique for dance majors. The research took place over a period of one academic year. In choosing her dancers she was influenced by “[...] a concern with diversity in terms of age, culture, gender, and dance background as well as an interest in the individuals that had developed during observations of their dancing” (p. 85). The participants in her study had extensive expertise in different dance techniques with a number of different teachers. During the period of study she taught the Alexander Technique to the four students privately once a week, and observed them in their technique class. In the middle of the study, she met with each dancer for an extended interview. She states:

The four dancers in my final study responded to my being and thinking as to the Alexander method and their experience within the dance program. The particular personalities and the particular context determined the content. Yet here, I am the research subject most fully explored: my process, my change, my thinking as it has been enlightened by my reading and by my intense engagement with the individuals who were my informants and who became my friends. (p. 32)

Most of the reported data has to do with the researcher's and the students' frustration with the rigid pedagogy that they were experiencing within the university dance department and the failure of the system to adequately address their needs as developing artists. We do not get much information about how the Alexander Technique was helpful to the students in their dancing, but read rather that the method as they were taught it seemed to confirm their beliefs that their dance training was poorly conceived. In other words, they believed that their dance training contradicted the principles they followed in learning the Alexander Technique. In fact a couple of the dancers subsequently quit the university to pursue their careers in different settings. Oliver writes: "I represented one of the few communication resources for the four dancers in this study. As a result, much of our time in Alexander lessons was spent discussing departmental politics" (p. 141). She suggests that: "In a department that placed a heavy emphasis upon technical expertise, it is not surprising that these individuals struggled intensely with the contrapuntal issue of artistry and the meaningfulness of their dance experience. [...] The desire to be self-expressive and to contribute something of their own was a recurrent theme" (p. 145 -146). In her conclusion, she criticizes the institution for not addressing students' individual needs and for being inflexible with their rules and regulations. "Too readily the system reprimands the disjoiner, discouraging many a courageous heart. Solidly planted, right in the center of the enterprise, there is a lump of immovable dogma" (p. 110).

In his master's thesis, Bral (1998) outlines Alexander's discoveries, describes an individual lesson in the technique, briefly recollects his experience teaching the technique, and presents his interpretation of the principles of the Alexander Technique. He relates the principles of the Alexander Technique to the views presented by various authors, specifically Goddard (1990, 1994, 1995) and Rouquet (1985, 1991). In a section of his thesis entitled "Intérêt pour le danseur", Bral relates his experience teaching the Alexander Technique to

dancer/choreographers. He conducted an informal interview with each of two dancer/choreographers who had studied the technique with him. Among the responses that he relates from these interviews are the following: “In my choreographic development, it permitted me to create dances which are more ‘acts’ than they are gratuitous movements. It is a more human, and less academic, creativity”⁷ (p. 81); and, from another dancer/choreographer: “I perceived that it helped me with technical movement. I made progress and above all, I gained more freedom, ease and fluidity”⁸ (p. 81).

When asked how the Alexander Technique influences his teaching pedagogy, a choreographer/dancer/dance teacher reported that in his dance teaching he gives precise indications on the direction of visual focus and the poise of the head as he senses them from his experience with the Alexander Technique. In work on lifts, he asks his partners to discover their shared directions

within the action. He further reported that he senses that he transmits what he learned in the Alexander Technique to the dancer that he lifts, and that his partners acknowledge that they feel the ground through the support that he gives them.

In a section of his thesis entitled “La technique Alexander et l’entraînement du danseur” (The Alexander Technique and Dance Training), Bral acknowledges that no dance class can be replaced by a somatic session or by a movement analysis class, but the integration of certain Alexander Technique principles could give a new orientation to a dance class. By first bringing the teacher’s attention to primary control, which is central to all movement, “It would be preferable to be more attentive to this coordination rather than to some position of the pelvis or exaggerated turnout of the feet. It is the spine, and the movement of the curves of the spine, which must be the primary concern of the professor”⁹ (p. 58). According to

⁷ “Dans ma démarche de chorégraphie, ça m’a permis d’inventer des danses qui sont plus des ‘actes’ que des mouvements gratuits. C’est une créativité plus humaine et moins académique.”

⁸ “Je m’aperçois que ça m’a facilité les mouvements techniques. J’ai fait des progrès et surtout, j’ai gagné en liberté, aisance et fluidité.”

⁹ “Il serait souhaitable d’être plus attentif à cette coordination plutôt qu’à une quelconque position du bassin ou d’ouverture exagérée des pieds. C’est la colonne vertébrale, et le mouvement des lordoses qui doit être la préoccupation première du professeur.”

Bral, the idea of directions could be explored in a dance class in many different ways, helping the dancer relate differently to exterior space and to the space of others, but also to his own internal space. “The sensation of unfolding oneself in space, of taking more space with one’s body, with one’s own skin, is transmitted to the lungs, which unfold in turn, and as all the cells of the body benefit, so does one’s ability to communicate with one’s surroundings”¹⁰ (p. 58). Bral also addresses the principle of systematic imitation that is too often used in dance study to the detriment of other possibilities for the learning of movement. The focus is then placed on immediate results, and attention is not necessarily paid to the process and to the means that could best be used to get to the desired movement.

In the following passage, Bral describes his experience taking a dance class with one of the members of the Trisha Brown Company who integrated the principles of the Alexander Technique into his dance teaching. (Most members of this company, including Trisha Brown, have studied the Alexander Technique, and several have gone on to become teachers of the technique.) He mentions that he remembers the class as being very dense, coherent and instructive, but still accessible, progressing in a coherent manner. “There really was pedagogical concern and a body of material to learn, chance and the principle of receptivity to excess without real guidance was absent, and it was comforting. [...] Everyone danced”¹¹ (p. 64).

Bral concludes that: “The practice of the Alexander Technique, by stimulating perception as well as postural tonus, had a positive effect on corporeal organization”¹² (p. 75). He concludes that the Alexander Technique could be helpful to many dancers, stating that the dancer could make use of it to find himself, and to improve both movement and expressivity.

¹⁰ “La sensation de se déployer dans l’espace, de prendre plus de place avec son corps, avec sa propre peau, se transmet aux poumons, qui se déploient à leur tour, et on font profiter toutes les cellules du corps, et se communique à l’entourage.”

¹¹ “Il y avait vraiment un souci pédagogique et une matière à apprendre, le hasard et le principe de la réceptivité à outrance sans réels conseils étaient absents et c’était réconfortant. [...] Tout le monde dansait.”

¹² “La pratique de la technique Alexander en agissant sur les perceptions, et en stimulant la fonction tonique intervient de façon positive sur la corporéité.”

Harris' (1998) master's thesis focuses on the effect of the Alexander Technique on modern dance aesthetics in general, and on her choreographic process in particular. Harris used a questionnaire sent to 43 Alexander teachers/dancers, and interviewed 20 Alexander teachers and/or dancers. The dancers that she interviewed had all studied the technique extensively, but might not have completed a teacher training program in accord with NASTAT guidelines. One chapter of her thesis is devoted to describing her experience of studying and practicing the Alexander Technique while continuing to explore and develop her own dance aesthetics. Her intention is "[...] to present the implications an extensive study of the Alexander Technique has on modern dance choreography and movement aesthetics" (p. 6). She states that:

[...] the Alexander Technique informed my choreography and performance abilities in terms of: 1) providing a firm foundation of a working sense of the primary control; 2) increasing awareness of my personal movement habits and expression of a conditioned ego; 3) enhancing clarity of spatial use and spaciousness within my body and mind; 4) helping provide a penalty-free choreographic zone in order to create with a non-judgmental, open and conscious sense of self; and 5) enabling me to find a deep sense of trust for myself as an integrated, whole, thinking-feeling dancer. (p. 36)

Further, Harris states that her dance aesthetics have greatly changed through the study of the Alexander Technique: "Having gained more freedom in my system and dancing, I tend to dance and create works that have a more expansive, open quality. My free flowing, light, sequential and fluid movement style can portray the ethereal conceptual themes I envision" (p. 36).

In conclusion, Harris writes that she sees:

[...] the Alexander Technique influencing modern dance aesthetics in terms of expanding the boundaries of traditional dance forms. [...] On the surface, it may appear that the Alexander Technique limits the possibilities of movement with the emphasis of freeing the neck and such, but in fact, the technique brings about unlimited possibilities of movement. [...] When the system is free, the dancer has more range and choices of movement. (p. 40)

But the pathway to these lofty goals in dance, I think, goes ineluctably through the quotidian, the habits of everyday life that are carried like excess baggage into the dance studio, and onto the stage. Many of the details of experience which may impact artistry and health are to be

discovered in the calm sense of the self in inaction. Awareness of relatively minor fixation, made while simply sitting, could expand potential logarithmically when it leads to weeding out fixity from expressive movement. So we must pay attention to the little things – to everyday details – and trust that this will inform the larger world of the dancer.

The themes and knowledge that have emerged from the literature have informed the direction of my research. As mentioned earlier, no research has looked in depth at the experience of the professional contemporary dancer in relation to the study of the Alexander Technique, and further, no researcher has reported on the experience of an Alexander practitioner (other than themselves) within the teaching context.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

The primary purpose of this study is to describe the experience of two professional contemporary dancers as they study the Alexander Technique and apply its principles to their dancing. Secondly, I will describe the experience of the Alexander Technique teacher in the process of working with the dancers. Throughout this paper, I will refer to the two contemporary dancers as the *participant dancers* and to the Alexander Technique teacher in the study as the *participant practitioner*. In references to material in the appendices, I will abbreviate the word appendix, as: (App.).

2.1 Choice of qualitative study

When I was first attempting to define the parameters of my research, I thought of gauging efficiency and expressivity in dancers studying the technique. My advisor asked me gently, “Is that really what you want to do? Because it is really not what you are telling me.” With this encouragement to further reflection, I realised that one thing that had always struck me when I was studying the technique was how varied and rich were students’ experiences and descriptions of the Alexander process. Sometimes these differences may have resulted from the variety of teaching methods used within the Alexander Technique community, but even the students of one particular teacher will often report strikingly different effects from the work. Their descriptions included such diverse particulars as sudden emotional and sensorial memory, as well as new awareness of behaviour in all realms: emotional, physical and intellectual.

So, rather than attempting to gauge in a quantitative manner differences in specific qualities of movement, such as efficiency and expressivity, I decided to look at the experience of dancers to see what could be gleaned from examining their perspectives on the process of studying Alexander Technique, and on the application of the technique to their dancing and daily lives. I wanted also to look at the experience of the practitioner teaching the dancers. I thus made the decision to undertake a qualitative study.

The focus of qualitative study, many researchers point out, is on the perception and experience of the participants (Bogdan and Biklin, 1998; Creswell, 2002; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990). It does not seek to support specific theory, and therefore seems an appropriate method for examining the experiences of contemporary dancers who are given new material (the Alexander Technique) to integrate in their dancing. Often, in contemporary dance, the open and individual methods of improvisation that may be used in the process of creation lead to unanticipated results. Green and Stinson (1999) refer to the postpositivist researcher as a choreographer “[...] remaining open to emerging pattern and meaning and to forms that are appropriate for them” (p.95). As first-time researcher with some choreographic experience, I felt inspired and encouraged by this phrase – the task seems less daunting when seen as one of choreographing, using the words with which participants describe their experience as the choreographic vocabulary.

The qualitative approach is also particularly apt for this research subject because the Alexander Technique deals not with achieving specific goals, but with attention to process as a means of preventing unconscious habitual responses. An important principle of the Alexander Technique is, in F.M. Alexander’s (1986) terms, reasoning out and following the *means whereby* rather than *end gaining*. What he means is that, if one’s attention is focussed on attaining a goal (*end gaining*), then one will tend to neglect the process (*means whereby*) that will most likely lead to achieving the goal in an efficient manner. Added benefits of staying with the *means whereby* are the unanticipated discoveries that are made when awareness is with the ongoing present, and the end in mind is not in close focus. Patton (1990) describes qualitative research as most appropriate when the focus of the research is on

the process and not on the end result, so that, as Stinson and Anijar (1993) wrote, “[...] personal meaning is constantly being constructed and reconstructed” (p. 58). So it seems appropriate that, in trying to understand a process-oriented method such as the Alexander Technique, I utilise research methods that attempt to record and interpret the process, rather than methods that look for, or anticipate, specific results.

Further, the Alexander Technique is taught, for the most part, in private sessions in which the main material considered is the student’s unique patterns of response, what Jones (1976) called *stereotyped response patterns*. A stimulus will always elicit the same pattern of muscular preparation in a particular individual, one that is unique to that individual, and learned through his unique contact with his environment. Therefore, the Alexander session deals with different material and has (sometimes markedly) different results in each case. So, although it is possible to see the effects of lessons on a specific activity, much of the Alexander experience is not predictable or measurable and would be best studied qualitatively. Creswell (1994) paraphrases Merriam (1988) when he writes: “Qualitative researchers are interested in meaning – how people make sense of their lives, experiences and their structures of the world” (p. 145). Qualitative research results are often presented in the form of case studies. Researchers describe case-study as the study of a person, a situation, or a phenomenon, which the researcher examines in depth, in order to comprehend the particularities of that individual case (Bogden and Bilken, 1998; Creswell, 1994; Laville and Dionne, 1996; and Patton, 1990). The case study seems most appropriate, according to Lessard-Hébert, Goyette and Boutin (1990), when “[...] the field of study is:

- the least constructed, therefore the most real
- the least limited, therefore the most open
- the least manipulable, therefore, the most uncontrolled¹³(p. 164).

¹³ “[...] *le champ d’investigation est :*

- *le moins construit, donc le plus réel;*
- *le moins limité, donc le plus ouvert;*
- *le moins manipulable, donc le plus incontrôlé.”*

These three conditions can be compared to my research to show close parallels. First, the least constructed, thus the most real: the participant dancers were completely left to their own devices as to how, and in what aspects of their dancing, they may attempt to apply the Alexander Technique. Second, the least limited, thus the most open: the participant dancers were not limited to dance movement, but might choose to apply the technique in everyday movement or in any specific activity. And third, the least manipulable, thus the most uncontrolled: the unique patterns of each individual, as well his responses to the material presented, cannot be controlled or predicted. The opportunities for change that arise within the context of Alexander sessions depend on a complex interaction between practitioner and student, wherein the methodology used in the sessions must adapt to the individuals involved. The manner in which the material is presented to one participant might not be appropriate with another participant and the practitioner may need to adapt his methods from one session to the next. Furthermore, because the Alexander Technique is an educational method, its success depends on what the student is able to learn in the sessions, as well as what he does with the new material between sessions.

For this study, I used journals and semi-structured interviews to record the experience of all participants. Green and Stinson (1996) point out that the collection of data conveying, through interviews with open ended questions, the experience of the participants, will lead the researchers to pursue each “ [...] individual’s emerging thought as it unfolds” (p. 94).

Although I analysed individually and concurrently the participant journals and interviews, and although I built a case record, following the model established by Patton (1990), I chose not to present the results in case-study format. I opted instead for a cross-case inductive analysis, which seemed to me more appropriate and suitable for the presentation of the results of this study. I will explain further this choice in section 2.5.

2.2 Participants in the study

The participants in this research were of two kinds: participant dancers and the participant practitioner. All signed a consent form, in which all the requirements for both the researcher and the participants are stated, and in which it is stated that the project will follow the code of ethics issued by the Université du Québec à Montréal (see App. A). Participant dancer anonymity was maintained throughout the study, and the participant dancers are given fictional names in the thesis. The participant practitioner is named. As one of the participant dancers is French speaking, her journals and the interviews conducted with her were initially recorded in French, then translated by the author. This material will appear in translation in the text, followed by notes referring the reader to the original text in Appendix E – for example: (App. E, #1). The translated material used in the thesis was presented to the participant for approval prior to its analysis and submission.

2.21 Participant dancers

The researcher selected two professional contemporary dancers by interview. The reason for purposeful sampling, as laid out by Patton (1990), is to choose participants who will best serve the research, in other words, who will best answer the research questions. The participant dancers had to show an interest in studying the Alexander Technique, and, as well, an interest in relating the experience of their study and application of the technique. The selection criteria for the participant dancers were that they be, one, willing to commit to the full period of research (10 weeks); two, full-time professional dancers; three, healthy (no major injuries that would prevent dancing); and, four, relatively naive (no previous extensive study of the Alexander Technique, at least within the last five years). I chose to use only naive subjects, partly because I think that the blunt expression of early experience may be revealing, before the analysis that takes place over time has clouded the immediacy of response. Also, as the learning curve tends to flatten out with time, and we would be less likely to see marked change in an experienced participant over only 10 weeks.

Although I am interested in diversity of experience, I chose to use only two participant dancers, because the amount of work and data to be collected would be unreasonably large with more participants, considering the methodological choices I have made. Writing on qualitative research, Stinson and Anijar (1993) state, “The time required for this process, and the quantity of materiel generated, tends to limit the number of subjects who can be included” (p.58). Using only one participant, on the other hand, would preclude the possibility of any cross-case comparisons that might be drawn from the data collected. Therefore, this study will go into depth with two participants’ experience rather than using a large participant base for comparison purposes.

I made the decision to use only professional dancers, because dancers who are dancing full-time throughout the research period will have greater opportunity to apply the Alexander Technique in dancing, and will be likely to produce more data for the study.

That the participants be contemporary dancers, rather than ballet, jazz or folk dancers, was a choice I made for two reasons, the first because of my personal experience in the field of contemporary dance, the second because the focus of contemporary dance tends to be on expression, freedom, individuality, and personality -- elements of dance best looked at qualitatively. The term contemporary dance has been used since the beginning of the twentieth century by different critics in reference to many dance styles, but the appellation was used more pointedly in the 1970’s by a small group of choreographers in France as a means of differentiating their work from the *modern jazz* and *modern dance* that were then popular. Contemporary dance is not a style – it borrows from different techniques (ballet, modern dance, jazz) without necessarily naming or mastering them. I use the term to avoid confusion, as many consider modern dance to be the work of a few pioneers (e.g. Martha Graham and José Limon). According to Fèbvre (1994), the appellation “contemporary dance” seeks to group together artists who are open to creative talent and more inclined towards experimentation than towards producing stereotyped dancers.

I have made the decision to use dancers who are not in companies that focus on the language of a specific choreographer, as I feel that the dancers’ range of possible exploration might be

limited if they are working within only one style. One Montréal dance company, Montréal Danse, is a repertory company that includes works from local as well as internationally known choreographers, and incorporates a broad stylistic range. Selecting participants from this company assured that the participant dancers would have the possibility of applying the Alexander Technique to different types of choreography. In Appendix B is a copy of letter sent to Kathy Casey, the artistic director of Montréal Danse, describing the study, and inviting any dancers who might be interested to contact me for an interview.

2.22 Participant practitioner

Since 1999, when the idea of conducting this research was first conceived, I thought of asking Lawrence Smith to be the Alexander Technique practitioner in the study. Fortunately he was interested and willing to devote the time required. It has taken three years to get the study underway, and fortunately, Lawrence's interest has not flagged. Together, we worked on a timetable that suited the needs of all participants, and agreed on the design of the study. We have worked together professionally on many occasions (workshops, conferences), and founded together the Manhattan Center for the Alexander Technique, in New York City, where we worked together for nine years.

Lawrence Smith is certified by The Canadian Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique, a Society for Teachers of the Alexander Technique affiliated society, which means that he had at least 1600 hours of training over a three-year period. He has had extensive experience in working with professional dancers and has taught the technique for more than 14 years.

I have included the Alexander Technique teacher as a participant in this study because of the very close interaction that occurs between the teacher and the student. The Alexander teacher uses his hands to sense the student's postural tone and how this tone changes in response to particular stimuli. Touch can pick up subtle changes before they become sufficiently manifest to register visually. He then brings what he perceives to the attention of the student,

and uses manual guidance and verbal suggestion to assist the student in altering behaviour. Hands-on guidance in the Alexander Technique accomplishes at least three things, sometimes simultaneously. As just mentioned, the hands sense the muscular condition of the student. They are then used to encourage a change in harmful patterns. To accomplish this, they indicate a direction of movement that the student's musculature may follow. They also communicate directly the practitioners corporeal organisation, that is, the open supported condition of the practitioner is sensed by the student through the contact of the teacher's hands. Further, the hands are used to initiate movement for the student, freeing the student of the need to decide to act. The student may then move without recourse to the habitual preparation that he usually uses to initiate movement. The teacher initiates movement while continuing to communicate a new manner of use to the student.

It is essential that the student is able to trust the practitioner, as a change in habitual behaviour may feel very wrong to the student, and he may be unable or unwilling to attempt moving in an unfamiliar manner without immediate (hands-on) guidance. The student's muscular condition (as well as his attachment to it) is rarely a simple maladaptive pattern acquired in relation to physical activity. The emotive aspect of the self is necessarily present in any habitual pattern, and complicates considerably the process of change. Altering habitual muscle tone may cause emotions to surface unexpectedly during Alexander sessions. In this case the practitioner's role is not one of psychotherapist. The role of the practitioner is one of guide and companion in the process of change.

The practitioner's use of himself in teaching is written about by many authors. I have chosen two, Barlow (1973), and Matthews (1984), who, I think, best describe this. Matthews (1984), in her master's thesis, wrote: "Just as psychoanalysts must undergo analysis as part of their training, just as therapists must have examined and worked through their own problems, so must Alexander teachers have had sufficient re-education so that their own proprioceptive sense is more accurate than before" (p. 18). She goes on to explain that "[...] there is one thing that is fundamental and perhaps more important than any other part of the procedure. This has to do with the teacher's use. Good use in the teacher is required for the hands-on work to be effective. Barlow (1973), a physician who trained as an Alexander Technique

teacher with Alexander wrote, “Alexander teachers, naturally, vary in their approaches, but unlike other teaching situations, they all have one thing in common: they will have to obey their own educational demands if they are to influence their pupils” (p. 203). Following the principles of the technique is important not just to the mechanics of the teaching situation, but in the dynamics of the pedagogical interaction as well. An *end-gaining* approach tends to create a teacher-student relationship based on power and authority, rather than on the more desirable, and Alexandrian, approach of fostering self-discovery and self-reliance in the student.

2.3 Setting

The Alexander Technique sessions took place in the practitioner’s office, and consisted of 20 private sessions, of 50 to 60 minutes in duration. The sessions included chair and table work, and, where applicable, other procedures, such as squatting and walking. (A description of an Alexander Technique session is given in Appendix D.)

2.4 Data collection

The entire corpus of data was collected from April 9, 2003 through June 20, 2003. For this study, I collected data in the form of:

16 hours of interviews with the participants – or about 440 pages transcribed.

Three journals from the participants, along with my own notes taken during the 10 week period.

Over a period of 10 weeks, the participant dancers studied the principles of the Alexander Technique, each receiving a total of 20 private sessions, two sessions per week. I decided on this structure based on the input of the Alexander Technique practitioner, and on my own experience, both as a student of the technique, and later, as a practitioner teaching dancers. In any somatic work, the time frame is important. Alexander considered a course of lessons to

be five sessions per week for three to six weeks, depending on the individual (Carrington and Carey, 1986). This was an intensive program and one that is rarely possible today. None-the-less, it is best that sessions, at least at the beginning, be closely spaced, as the student will tend to more easily build new behaviour when it is frequently reinforced, rather than reverting completely to habitual behaviour between sessions that are too widely spaced in time. After the student gains more awareness of his habitual use and begins to apply the technique outside of the lessons, it becomes more feasible to space lessons further apart. So, a balance must be struck between putting sessions sufficiently close to effectively build new behaviour, and allowing enough overall time for comfortable integration of this new behaviour and its subsequent application in dance.

I first met with the dancers on April 9, 2003. The study began immediately thereafter. Due to the schedule of one of the dancers, I opted to shorten the study period to 10 weeks from the original 12. My first interviews with the dancers solicited mostly biographical information. Three weeks into the study, one of the dancer participants became pregnant. She advised me that she would still be active in dance throughout the period of the study, choreographing and taking dance class, so I decided to pursue the study with her. Although one of my first requirements for participants was that they be active professionally – that is, rehearsing and performing – I felt that interesting data might emerge from her experience choreographing. I had chosen at the outset to look at each participant in a holistic manner, looking at the uniqueness of the experience of each dancer, because, although they are in the same company, they have different backgrounds and capacities.

During the study period, the experience of the participants was recollected and recorded in two ways: participant journals and interviews. These two techniques were chosen to assure the diversity of information and to allow each participant to recall his experiences in different settings. A question posed in an interview may stimulate a participant to relate something that had not occurred to him when writing in his journal, and the interviewer posing questions cannot hope to anticipate the categories of response.

By using both written and spoken means of collecting data, I hope to encourage broader reflection and the expression of a more holistic point of view. It is my hope also that, in being asked to describe and reflect on their experiences, the dancer participants will learn to pay more attention to what they will be asked to describe, and will perhaps take note of things that might otherwise pass unnoticed. The knowledge that one will be asked to later reflect on an event heightens the observation of that event, as the act of reflection calls forth observations to conscious consideration. This process contributes to the meaningfulness of the experience.

2.41 Journals

According to Boutin (1997), the journal permits the participant to recollect and reflect on his experience. It gives the participant the opportunity to select what he wants to communicate to the reader – in this case, the researcher. One of my main concerns was that all the participants feel comfortable elaborating on their experiences, and that they not feel inhibited by the writing process. To this end, if the participants had experienced difficulty in fulfilling this requirement of the study, I was prepared to supply them with a guide sheet providing suggestions for the writing of the journal. This proved unnecessary, as the participants provided written material that was rich in description, and quite pertinent to the subject of the study.

The participant dancers were asked to record their in-lesson experiences in journals, as soon as possible following each session, while their experience was still fresh. They were also encouraged to make journal entries as often as they wished regarding their experience of the integration the Alexander Technique in their dancing. It was suggested that a minimum of two journal entries per week be respected to insure sufficient data.

The participant practitioner was also asked to keep a journal, recording his observations on the participants' in-lesson response to the Alexander Technique, which would lend another perspective to the study. The experience of the practitioner is important for establishing the extent of faulty kinaesthesia – inaccurate proprioception relating to body position or muscle

tone, for example -- that can be noted in many subjects. Here the practitioner's perspective could contribute to the researcher's understanding of the participant dancers' experience within the Alexander Technique sessions, and could serve to further elucidate the complexity of integrating new behaviour.

Journals were collected twice from all the participants in the weeks preceding the scheduled interviews, that is, at both the mid-point and at the end of the study. Reading the journals before the interviews helped the researcher in preparing the interviews. This preparation influenced the orientation of the interviews, and suggested questions to further elucidate and elaborate the experiences touched on in the journals.

At the study's mid-point, I collected the participants' journals for the first time, which helped me in preparing the questions for the second interview. After collecting the journals from all participants, I read them with my research question in mind. What were they telling me or not telling me? I searched for clues that would help me to extract information that would help to better describe the participants' experience. I gave verbal feedback to all of the participants concerning the writing of the journals, and tried to encourage them to elaborate further on their experience, even if it did not always seem pertinent to them. I looked for details, raw material, without censure or judgement.

2.42 Interviews

In this study, the researcher was the interviewer. The interviewer needs to develop a good rapport with the interviewee. This means that the interviewees must sense that the interviewer respects and values them, and will thus value what they say. The interviewer also needs to establish a neutral stance, so that the interviewee senses that what he says will not be judged. "Rapport is a stance vis-à-vis the person being interviewed. Neutrality is a stance vis-à-vis the content of what that person says" (Patton, 1990 p. 317). To this end, I downplayed my personal experience as a teacher of the Alexander Technique, so that the

participant dancers felt free to elaborate on the process (even if that involved criticism of the technique being used).

In conducting an interview, the interviewer should make certain to ask real questions and to avoid leading questions. By real questions, Seidman (1991) means that the interviewer should ask questions to which he does not already know the answers. By leading questions, she means that the way in which a question is formulated, in terms of syntax, tone or intonation, can suggest an answer. The researcher has to make sure that the interviewee is using his “inner voice” as opposed to a “public voice”, meaning that he speaks not to impress or please the interviewee. The interviewer must be prepared to ask follow-up questions when warranted, for example, he should be prepared to ask to hear more about a subject, when he senses that he hasn’t heard the whole story, that details are missing or that the feelings of the interviewee are not explained. Also, he must ask questions when he may not have understood the interviewee fully. In regular conversation we often pass over or let go of elements that we don’t understand. In an interview, it is most important to not let this happen: “Not having understood something in an early interview, an interviewer might miss the significance of something a participant says later” (Seidman, 1991, p. 59).

All interviews were taped, transcribed, translated (when necessary), and returned to the participants for approval. In Appendix C are a few examples of the questions that the participants were asked in the second interview. Each interview was 60 to 75 minutes in duration. “By preserving the words of the participant, researchers have their original data” (Seidman, 1991, p.87). “Tape-recording also benefits the participants. They can feel assured that there is a record of what they said to which they have access” (Seidman, 1991, p.91).

The interviews were scheduled at least two weeks in advance, at times convenient for both researcher and participants, and occurred in the environment chosen by the interviewee. As Freyssinet-Domingon (1997) states that:

The office or the home of the interviewer does not seem appropriate for the unfolding of a meeting in which it is the interviewer who is understood to have the knowledge and power. Otherwise, the simple respect for social ritual dictates that it should be the one who makes the request who should go to the ‘territory’ of the interviewee, workplace or home.¹⁴ (p. 155)

I chose to use semi-structured interviews. The purpose of semi-structured interviews, according to Patton (1990), is to find out what can not be easily observed (in this case the experience) and “[...] to access the perspective of the person being interviewed” (p. 278). Since the primary objective of this study is to relate the experience of the participant dancers in applying the Alexander Technique to their dancing, I consider their words to be the main voice. “There is no recipe for the effective question. The truly effective question flows from an interviewer’s concentrated listening, engaged interest in what is being said, and purpose in moving forward” (Seidman, 1991, p. 70). By asking open-ended questions, the interviewer establishes the ground to be explored, allowing the participant to go in the direction he chooses.

I conducted three semi-structured interviews with each participant -- one at the beginning, one at the mid-point and one at the end of the research period. This structure followed the phenomenological three-interview format presented by Seidman (1991). The first interview was done at the outset of the study, before the Alexander Technique was introduced, and served to establish the context of the participants’ experience. The second interview was conducted after the first five-week period, and allowed the participants to express their experience while in the context of the study. The third interview was done after the second and final five-week period, which gave the participants an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of the experience of the study. Pre-determined questions were prepared for all interviews after the journals were read. The prepared questions for the participant dancer

¹⁴ “Le bureau ou le domicile de l’enquêteur semble peu approprié au bon déroulement d’une rencontre ou c’est à l’enquêté que sont reconnus savoir et pouvoir. En outre, [...] le simple respect des rituels sociaux veut que ce soit au demandeur de se dérouter ou de se rendre sur le «territoire» de l’enquêté, lieu de travail ou domicile.”

interviews were the same for each participant at each of the three scheduled interviews. This enabled me to see if similarities or contrasts appeared in the participant responses. Even though the prepared interviews were the same for each participant dancer, emerging new ideas often led me to pose follow-up questions. I attempted to listen carefully and to remain open to emerging avenues of questioning, while none-the-less attempting to return to the prepared line of questioning when follow-up questions were answered.

Following the second set of interviews, I began to realize the interactive nature of this study, with all four parties involved, the three participants and myself. At first, I had the impression of being the outsider who would look at phenomena which I would then describe from the perspective of an expert in the fields under observation. After discussion with my advisor, I realized how interconnected we all were in this project – that we were equal parts of a sensorial and intellectual quartet. She suggested that I arrange an informal meeting with all participants, in order to solicit more information. This taped meeting took place a week before the end of the study, and brought us all together for the first time. For clarification, I titled this interview the “informal quartet”. I collected the journals in the last week of the study and wrote a first draft of results. I gave myself a few weeks to prepare for my final interviews. As a researcher, it was in this informal interview that I best sensed the study in its globality.

2.5 Analysis of data

In this section, I will present the researcher (myself) and some methodological choices that I made in analysing and presenting the data. I will also consider the importance of such a study to the fields of dance and somatics.

2.51 The researcher

Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to “theoretical sensitivity” as a personal quality of the researcher. “It indicates an awareness of the subtleties of meaning of data” (p. 41). This awareness can come from three different sources: from literature - familiarity with the material written on the subject; from professional experience; and from personal experience. In the course of my studies in the fields of dance and Alexander Technique, I have become acquainted with much of the prominent literature. Some of my personal and professional experience in these two fields is detailed below.

I was initially trained in gymnastics and in dance, both ballet and modern. I subsequently completed the three-year teacher certification program of the National Ballet School in Toronto, receiving my diploma in 1981. It was there that I had my first experience of somatic methods – twice weekly sessions in the Feldenkrais method. I began studying the Alexander Technique in New York City, along with various modern dance techniques. I danced professionally with a couple of small companies and with several independent choreographers. In 1986, I enrolled in an Alexander Technique teacher training course, from which I graduated in 1989. Thus, I have had the experience of being a professional dancer studying the Alexander Technique, and of being, for 12 years, a practitioner of the Alexander Technique working with professional dancers. I have taught dance for over 20 years.

While the above experience gave me more than adequate theoretical sensitivity towards my subject, I had also to beware of certain biases that I may have developed in the course of my experience. “Particularly in qualitative research, the role of the researcher as the primary data collection instrument necessitates the identification of personal values, assumptions and biases at the outset of the study” (Creswell, 1994, p. 163). In other words, I needed to remain vigilant in data collection and analysis that I was not projecting my own experience.

Although I recall experiencing rapid changes in my dancing when I first began studying the Alexander Technique, in retrospect, I can state that it was only with time that I was able to fully integrate those changes to the extent that I was no longer dependant on an Alexander

Teacher constantly reinforcing the changes so that I did not slip back into former patterns. As a teacher of the Alexander Technique, I have often been frustrated because dancers may respond quickly within the context of the lesson, but have difficulty maintaining or integrating the work in their lives. The new behaviour was learned, but not sufficiently understood for it to be readily accessible. In other words, it is one thing to learn a movement possibility, yet quite another to use this possibility when a stimulus is calling forth an older, more established pattern. The older habit wins when consciousness is not applied. So I am aware that the time frame that I used for this study is relatively short to expect to see improved use applied consistently in dance movement. Nevertheless, I think that the experiences of the dancers within the framework that I laid out have provided some valuable insights into the process.

I made the decision prior to the commencement of the study to not share my personal experience with the participants during the study, and not to discuss with the participants the material being collected from journals and interviews. I did this so as not to suggest what they might experience. I wanted them to feel very free to express whatever they were experiencing, even should it differ dramatically from my expectations or from my own experience. However, during the study, after a discussion with my advisor, I made a change in my planned methodology. I decided to set up an informal interview one week before the end of the study period with all three participants together. This informal group interview turned out to be very valuable.

2.52 Analysis

This section describes the process I went through when analyzing the data, and presents some of the methodological choices that I made. The data collected in this study is presented as cross-case inductive analysis, although I followed some of the steps suggested for typical case studies. As Patton (1990) described it, “The case study approach to qualitative analysis is a specific way of collecting, organising, and analysing data. The purpose is to gather comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about each case of interest” (p. 30).

Thus, in constructing these case studies, I followed two of the three steps laid out by Patton (1990).

First, I assembled the raw data. In this case the raw data consisted of all participant journals and interviews. As this is the first step for case analysis, I made certain that the information for each case was as complete as possible. For example, in this study, I read the journals of the participants before the interviews conducted with them, to assist in preparing questions designed to further elucidate their experiences. This also provided the opportunity to verify that the journals were complete (at least one entry per Alexander session) and that they contained information that would serve the study.

Second, I constructed a case record. This meant taking the raw data and condensing it and ordering it chronologically and topically. For example, the participant practitioner data was viewed alongside of the participant dancers, to obtain a good chronological record of the process. I looked through the raw data for themes that seemed recurrent in order to develop categories. Data collected in this study was analysed inductively, as described by Patton (1990): “Inductive analysis means that the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis” (p.390).

After these two steps, if I had followed a typical individual case study procedure, I would have written a case study narrative. Patton describes this as “[...] a readable, descriptive picture of a person or program making accessible to the reader all the information necessary to understand the person or program” (p. 388). Instead, I chose to present the data in the form of cross-case inductive analysis, hoping to give the reader a comprehensive understanding of the experience of the participants. I categorized the data from the individual dancer participants, and proceeded to classify their experiences within each category. I retained the words used by all participants in describing their experiences, using, for the most part, complete quotations. The data collected from the practitioner participant was examined parallel to that from the participant dancers, when pertinent. I also devote a small section in

3.4 to presenting some the practitioner's experiences in more detail. In this case, cross-case analysis became prevalent.

A further methodological choice I made was presenting as well as discussing the data within the same chapter. In other words, I analyzed the data while presenting it, including with it my interpretation, supported with the viewpoints of other authors, rather than interpreting the results in a separate section. I felt that this approach presented the globality of the participants' experience, and helped me to answer the research questions.

2.53 Triangulation

Triangulation is used in research to establish credibility and verify findings. Creswell (2002) writes:

Triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection. [...] This ensures that the study will be accurate, because the information is not drawn from a single source, individual, or process of data collection. In this way, it encourages the researcher to develop a rapport that is both accurate and credible. (p. 280)

Patton (1990) details the four types of triangulation used in qualitative research as: triangulation of sources, of methods, of analysis, and of theories. One of these four was used in this study. The use of journals and interviews to record the experiences of the participants served to provide triangulation of methods used in data collection.

2.6 The importance of the study

In my search through the studies completed on the Alexander Technique and dance, I encountered none that attempted to describe the experience of dancers studying the technique alongside the experience of a practitioner, other than the researcher, working with them. Also, the qualitative studies that I am aware of deal retrospectively with the study of the Alexander Technique – that is, participants who had studied in the past were asked to

describe their experiences. I think that there is value in attempting to use journals and interviews that are conducted while participants are in the process of studying to bring out detail that might be edited out of later summaries of the overall experience. Also, taking two participant dancers involved in similar work (from the same dance company) and subjecting them to the same material (Alexander Technique) presented by one practitioner, could be expected to generate data showing differences and similarities of process.

This study could be of value to dancers, to teachers of dance as well as to Alexander Technique practitioners or other somatic educators working with dancers. It could serve to elucidate aspects of pedagogy particular to the Alexander Technique, and the pertinence of this educational methodology to dance.

Finally, this research is important because the description of the dancer's experience in studying and applying to dance the Alexander Technique could bring some understanding of how and to what extent the material can be assimilated and applied by the dancer.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS/DISCUSSION

I will begin this chapter by presenting the participants and their histories. Then, using data collected from interviews with the participants and from their journals, I will recall their past experience with somatic study and describe what motivated them to participate in this study. Finally, I will present the themes that emerged from the data collected from the participants, intertwined with my analysis of the data and by citations presenting applicable theory from the literature.

The main themes that emerged from the data are:

- Experience of the participants in the sessions
- Application in dance
- Acknowledgement of differences
- Experience of the practitioner
- Experience in other activities
- Change of perception

At the end of the study I collected the journals and, following the guidance of my advisor, gave myself time to allow meaning to emerge from the data so that I could be more specific in my last interview. For example, it was only after the third interview with one of the dancers that I was able to see the whole picture – although my point of entry had been the journals. They immediately spoke to me more than had the interviews. I suppose that my lack of experience in designing and conducting interviews played a part in this. As I mentioned in the methodology, I conducted an informal interview with all participants during the ninth week of the study. This interview brought me closer to everyone's experience and enabled me to more clearly envision categories of experience.

While reading the journals with my questions in mind, I discovered a few threads which I decided to follow. First, in the writing of the dancers, I saw a change in the way they thought about the body, a change in their beliefs concerning how things should feel, a change in their approach to certain movements or situations, and even a change in how some things should look. Through their words, I tried to sense their experience. This became for me a very sensorial experience. Some of the experiences that I had had studying the Alexander Technique while dancing professionally came back to me. I also discovered new aspects of the struggle to successfully apply the Alexander Technique to dance. Reading the dancers' journals brought home to me again the complexity of the concepts one must deal with when wrestling with the Alexander Technique, and the realization that understanding requires time and constant exposure to the material.

I made the decision to present the data and to interpret it within one chapter, on a point by point basis, for two reasons. First, the globality of the participants' experience seems clearer to my view when intertwined with references and theory from other sources, and, second, it seems to me that it will be easier for the reader, and will bring him closer to the globality of the experience, that theoretical points are made alongside each element of experience, rather than putting analysis later, and thus obliging the reader to refer back to particular data in order to make sense of it.

3.1 Participants' histories

To preserve the anonymity of the dancer participants, fictitious names are used throughout.

EVA

Eva is a 30 year old professional contemporary dancer, who has also been choreographing. She has been dancing professionally for 10 years, and with Montréal Danse for four years. She started studying ballet at the age of six, and continued until she was 11, at which time her training began to gradually shift to include contemporary dance. During this time she

performed with youth companies, and continued to do so through the end of her high school years.

After high school, she moved to Montréal to enter the three-year dance training program at LADMMI (Les ateliers de danse moderne de Montréal incorporé). She subsequently worked with Danse Partout in Québec City and on projects with many choreographers in Montréal, including Sarah Bild, Benjamin Hatcher and Jean Pierre Perrault. In 1998, she joined Montréal Danse. Eva's choreography has been presented in Montréal at Studio 303, in Québec City at la Rotonde and, in collaboration with another artist, in British Columbia, New York City, and Switzerland.

Eva has had some exposure to other somatic methods, most notably to Body-Mind Centering, and she practices Pilates and Gyrotonics. She has had no major accidents or surgery. She recalls having one injury to her back which prevented her from dancing for a couple of weeks. She describes herself as a strong, grounded dancer, who is drawn to lyrical and sinuous styles of moving in which the whole body is waving. When asked what is thrilling about dance for her, she replied:

[...] being able to communicate with an audience – being in a position where you can – it's quite special, you can give and receive, and exchange. [...] But it's really important to me that it have a creative element, it's not just, it's not body work in the sense of going to the gym to work out, working out, but it's involving the imagination... and the emotions.

Eva was interested in this research project because of the Alexander Technique, the positive benefits of which she had heard about from other dancers. She had no previous experience of the technique, and saw this study as an opportunity for her to study the technique fairly intensively (twice weekly sessions), and to record her experience, as well. When asked about her expectations for the research project she stated: "Well, I hope to learn something [laughs] about Alexander. I'm sort of trying to branch out in my dancing in different ways and I hope this will help me find another path."

Asked about possible reservations she might have about participating in the study, she stated:

I may have a little bit of a reservation, and I don't know, I've never studied it, but I know somatic techniques... I tend to get too in my head, and it's probably why I haven't done it before, cause then I start thinking too much about what I'm doing, analyzing everything, and I find it actually limits what I'm doing.

Eva was in rehearsal during the first three weeks of the 10 week study period, then choreographed on other dancers for the remaining seven weeks, while continuing to take a daily dance class.

JACQUELINE

Jacqueline has been dancing professionally for over 25 years. During this time, she participated in the creation of 95 works from some 40 choreographers, including Martine Époque, Paul-André Fortier, Edouard Lock, Jean-Pierre Perreault, James Kudelka and José Navas. She began dancing at the age of three with classical ballet. At the age of 15, she added modern dance to her training, studying the techniques of Cunningham, Graham and Limon. Her professional career began in 1978 in Montréal with Le Groupe Nouvelle Aire, and subsequently with Fortier Danse Création. Since 1986 she has been a member of Montréal Danse. In her journal she described her qualities as a dancer as:

I have very clear lines. I have a good sense of space; I have worked very hard to develop a dynamic interplay between fluidity and staccato traits -- compact and incisive. I don't think this is a strength that came naturally to me, but is rather an ability that I developed.... Yes, quite consciously. I also have a good sense of rebound in my jumps, but I am aware that I have lost some strength in my ankles, the impact in my lower back is now limiting me in my jumps. (App. E, #1)

Over the years, Jacqueline has had a fair amount of experience with various kinds of somatic work, including Antigymnastique, Pilatés and the Feldenkrais Method. About 15 years ago, she studied the Alexander Technique over a period of one year. In her journal she wrote of what motivated her to participate in this study:

Fifteen years ago, when I first had lessons in the Alexander Technique, I was unable to make this link [between dance and the Alexander Technique]. Your research project offered me the opportunity to try again. I saw also a framework (with the journal, the interviews) well suited to this kind of reflection. (App. E, #2)

She has had no major surgery, but did suffer a fairly serious automobile accident in which her pelvis was displaced and ligaments were torn. Jacqueline adds that a recurrent problem she has with her back is also a factor that led her to participate in this study. She wrote that her back injury has been with her for about four years, on and off, that a certain kind of movement at a certain speed was difficult for her, and that she sometimes had to alter or adapt some choreography due to the condition.

During the 10 weeks of the study period, Jacqueline rehearsed intensively during six weeks, and for the remaining four weeks maintained her daily routine of giving herself a class.

LAWRENCE

The Alexander Technique practitioner, Lawrence Smith, has been teaching since 1988. He is a STAT and CANSTAT certified practitioner with a professional background in theatre that included several years of dance and movement training. He has had considerable experience working with dancers, especially during the 10 years that he taught in New York City. I asked him what led him to study, and eventually train to teach, the Alexander Technique:

My own background included a fair amount of dance training. I was a professional actor, and wanted to study movement to help my onstage presence. I had the idea that I could accumulate a vocabulary of gestures that would serve me in different situations. I began the study of corporeal mime (Decroux technique), which seemed to me to be most suited to the actor. I took a very mechanical view of the matter. I began the study of ballet to assist the education of my instrument, and I continued with modern dance as well. After several years of this, and after touring and performing movement theatre throughout Europe and North America, I was a wreck. My approach to movement, that was purely one of creating external shapes, was killing me.

I had as well the experience of writing and directing a play in which I was not an actor. I used actors who had been trained in movement as I had, in Decroux technique. Observing the actors over a two-month rehearsal period, and through some 30 performances, I became acutely aware of the inadequacy of the method to express what I really wanted to see. I saw that the actors had created a carapace of gesture which had little connection with the actor's internal life. That in fact, although it was sometimes interesting to watch the shapes and dynamic qualities that they could create, the technique often made them less individually expressive. There was a closed and muscularly implosive quality to the work. I had known about the Alexander Technique, but what really stimulated my interest was, first of all, you [the author] suggesting that I

take lessons, and second, I read Frank Pierce Jones's book on the technique, and was really struck by the psychological implications of misuse.

When I asked Lawrence, in our first interview, why he was interested in participating in this study, he replied:

Because of my ongoing interest in the application of the Alexander Technique in the performing arts. I see it as an opportunity to work with experienced professional dancers who have an interest in the work, but who might not otherwise have considered taking two lessons per week for 10 straight weeks. Today, it is common practice for students to take one lesson per week for a number of weeks. It is really very difficult to sustain the work, let alone progress with it, under these circumstances, especially when the student is involved in intense activity, such as dance rehearsal or performance. He leaves the lesson with a fragile new organization that must be almost immediately abandoned or is lost in a rehearsal situation.

Lawrence felt that the study would provide the opportunity for him to explore the process of the Alexander Technique through the experience of the student. He felt that the context of a typical Alexander session was not necessarily conducive to the in-depth expression of the student's experience.

In the same interview I asked Lawrence what his expectations were for the study:

I think that every student helps me to improve my work, but I hope that the dancers involved will allow me to work in a fairly refined way, on issues relating to balance, and in particular, on the psoas muscles and leg rotators, which are so often over-solicited in dancers. I think also that being obliged to write about the sessions that I will teach will force me to think about the work in a productive way.

3.2 The Alexander Technique session

In this section, "The Alexander Technique session", I will first describe the Alexander Technique practitioner's approach to teaching dancers. I will then look at the dancer participants' perspective on the practitioner's approach. Finally I will present descriptions of the sessions in the words of the participants, which will help to elucidate what is emphasized and experienced by all participants within the sessions.

3.21 The practitioner's approach

In his journal, begun before the sessions commenced, Lawrence described his approach to working with dancers:

In giving a first lesson to a dancer, I do not want to undermine his sense of movement knowledge. I want to make it clear that I respect his knowledge and ability, and that I do not wish to take the position of someone who understands his domain as well as he does. I want to make it clear that the Alexander Technique is about the global use that is used to support movement, and not about the specifics of the movement itself. In this sense, dancers often dance beautifully and expressively with what we might consider to be less than optimal use. So I do not want to interfere with what they know, I simply wish to add an element which may be useful for them.

Therefore, I do not start sessions with a demonstration of what they do “wrong” – that is, I do not have them sit and stand and then point out that they are pulling their heads back and down. (This is often done in first sessions.) This only serves to make them feel inept, and causes them to try to get it right. Telling them that they cannot sit and stand well can immediately undermine their sense of themselves as movers, or can lead them to become defensive and reject the work out of hand.

When I asked him in our first interview how he began the sessions, he stated:

I prefer to begin with them sitting (where they are not engaging their dancer's balance as they are when standing, and where they are more evidently in the quotidian), coaxing and guiding them into a more available condition, and working on finding a more neutral state. Once this is accomplished, they usually can move to standing very easily without their customary preparation, and, being dancers, they usually clearly sense the difference from their habitual movement. I then focus more on how they are in their everyday posture, noting that poor everyday use militates against good use in the dance studio. Later, work on the arms and legs in relation to the torso will deal with more specifically dance related issues.

3.22 The dancers' perception of the practitioner's approach

One thing that both dancers expressed in their journals was the active participation demanded by the approach to the Alexander Technique which seemed to come across in Lawrence's teaching, and which differed from their past experiences. Eva compared her experience in the session with her past experience in somatic work by saying:

[...] it's quite new for me this way of participating actively in body work; it's not like having massage, where I'm just abandoning myself and going into a state of relaxation. I'm participating, and yet, I'm not trying to do anything. The other experience I've had, if I'm participating I'm actively doing stuff. In the Alexander practice I feel like participating by trying not to do anything.

Then, further on in her journal, she described her struggle with this non-doing approach:

I really have to struggle to keep myself awake and aware and actively participating through not doing anything. My first tendency is to close my eyes and let myself release into the manipulations. It is as if in remaining engaged, I am training my brain at the same time as the muscles and bones.

At the end of our second interview, at the mid-point of the study, when asked if she had anything to add, Jacqueline spoke of Lawrence's teaching:

I like the dynamic way that Lawrence teaches the Alexander Technique. From my past experience, which was fifteen years ago, I have kept a good sense of the directions, but I also remember having lived in a fragile body, which seemed flat as a sheet of paper. I could not see myself doing difficult tasks. But this was not the case with Lawrence. He brings in examples from his life – he does renovation, he squats, he gardens, he runs, always thinking of these principles. Thus, by different examples, he makes one understand that effort and release can be compatible. (App. E, #3)

Finally, Jacqueline concludes with: “With Lawrence's teaching, I see the Alexander Technique as more active and dynamic than I had understood it from my previous experience” (App. E, #3).

3.23 The dancers' descriptions of the sessions

The journals and interviews of both dancers were filled with descriptions of movement sensations, and with details about joints and body parts. In the following excerpts, both dancers related what they experienced in the sessions with specific movements, and how it had meaning for them. Eva stated:

The changes I feel mostly now are during the Alexander sessions, for example in the squatting, feeling the directions in the body, being able to move up and downwards very easily. And the release in the neck, being able to move the arms keeping the neck free and released in the shoulders lengthened and down – that is different – I'd often worked on keeping the shoulders down but in a very muscular way, pulling the shoulder-blades

down, but it has always felt a bit weird for me, because it felt like I had a lid on. Here there is nothing pulled down, it is just released.

And Jacqueline wrote:

During hands-on work (sitting and standing), at different speeds and, at times with stops to investigate and to renew the initiation of changing of levels, I felt a fullness and a circulation along the vertical and throughout all of my body to which was added an opposition between the lower back and the knees forward. For several minutes, I felt very clearly the initiation and the direction by the head (forward and up). There followed a decrease in the effort in the legs and a spreading out of the feet. All of my articulations – ankles, knees, hips, neck (at the base of the skull) gave me a sense of mobile hinges, oiled and supple. Wow! (App. E, #4)

Later, I chose to ask them in interviews to describe this experience again, in hopes of getting more spontaneous and concise descriptions. What then emerged was more description of their experience with directions, rather than of any particular movements. They spoke more of change at the level of thought. Eva began by stating:

There is a lot of repetition of actions like sitting and standing that we come back to session after session, so I find that just staying alert with that – again – sometimes I can sort of zone out or let my mind wander away and, it's true, often we'll talk about what's going on at the same time. So I keep coming back to keeping the directions going without doing anything... It is a challenge.

In the progression of her experiences described throughout the study, we sense how she has opened her perceptual field. Blumenthal (1996) described this aspect of the technique as follows:

The technique is in essence a training in wakeful doing. That is, we learn to observe ourselves in stillness and carry that attention into activity. Additionally, from that base of attention we learn to consciously direct our actions or movement not by doing but by holding an intention in mind. Attention with intention is the cornerstone of Alexander. (p. 46)

Jacqueline described her experience in the session, referring also to this open perceptual field:

During the session, I feel calm and well. [...] I find it surprising to be attentive to myself, and at the same time responding to Lawrence's tactile and verbal indications. And there are times when, by a word, or by an action in combination with a word or a gesture, I sense an opening in my body or suddenly a circuit, like a current of energy which flows. Then I feel calm but also really very alert. With all kinds of small sensations. It comes and goes. (App. E, #5)

The preceding passage describes the state of calm and yet readiness that allows one to remain attentive to changes while simultaneously responding to verbal and tactile indications – a process-oriented approach. Jones (1976) wrote about this unification of perceptual fields:

‘Perception’ has been defined as the process of knowing objects and events by means of the senses. Traditionally it has been divided up according to sense modalities – visual perception, auditory perception, tactile perception, and so on. More recently a tendency has grown for treating the field as a unity in which divisions according to particular senses are arbitrary. One division that is still regularly made is the division between the environment and the self, the term ‘perception’ being limited to the former and ‘proprioception’ used for the latter only. Perception, it is sometimes asserted, can be directed only one way at a time – either out or in. The practice of the Alexander Technique, however, creates an expanded field of attention in which the interaction of the self and the environment is perceived as an ongoing process. The perceptual field has a very simple organization, but it always takes in both the self (including the relation of the head to the trunk) and something of the environment. Thus the teacher perceives what he himself is doing as well as what the pupil is doing. (p. 159)

This kind of open focus, a sense of the self and its environment, seems a prerequisite for progress in the technique, and is as important for the teacher to maintain as he works as it is for the student.

3.3 Experience of the practitioner

For this section, I choose to let Lawrence’s words speak for his experience. As I mentioned earlier, no study using the Alexander Technique has been done that looks at both the experience of the practitioner (when the practitioner is other than the researcher) and that of the student participant. For this reason, this section has significant importance for the field of somatics. To me, as a researcher, it brings forth questions about my own teaching of the Alexander Technique and dance that I could write about and analyze more extensively in the future.

I would like to reiterate how important the role of the practitioner is in helping the Alexander student to discard harmful patterns. The teacher has to be clear enough in his directions, both verbal and tactile, that the student can trust the new use of himself that he is learning, even in

the face of the initial discomfort he may experience when he leaves behind his habitual postural tone. Here is Lawrence's point of view:

The Alexander teacher has to provide the student with a clear enough theoretical framework for understanding the technique. For many, the hands-on work will lead to an experience of improved use that will seem clear to them, or that will intrigue them enough to encourage them to explore further. Some will not have a positive early experience from the hands-on work, and may in fact find that it feels distinctly wrong. In this case, the student must be able to trust the teacher, and he must be able to understand the procedures to be followed and the goals of the work. Also, we are asking a lot when we ask someone to give up their balance and to let go of muscular action that has constituted their sense of self for perhaps decades. In order to allow something new, we have to let go of the familiar.

In our last interview, I asked Lawrence what his participation in the study had brought him:

First, I loved working with these dancers. I think, in both cases, we worked very well and productively together. As they were not paying me, I had the sense that we had embarked together on an experiment, so, at least at times, I felt less like a therapist or pedagogue, and more like part of a process. (This was not always true. I do recall, at the beginning, feeling the need to get the material across quickly, due to the time constraints of the study.)

Frequently, I see dancers when they are injured. Otherwise, they rarely have the time or resources to explore the technique. This study gave me the opportunity to work with two excellent dancers who were simply interested in expanding their movement potential. So I was not being asked to "fix" something, which can often be the case with injured dancers. And, because the Alexander Technique is not a treatment or quick-fix, injured dancers often quit before they are able to make the improvements in use that might lead to better functioning.

So I had two fairly healthy dancers (it's hard to find a dancer who does not have some injury, past or present), who were committed to coming twice a week to explore the Alexander Technique. This is a very good situation to begin with. Since both dancers had committed themselves for the 10 week period, I felt that early doubts about the work would not drive them away. For example, right at the beginning, Eva expressed doubts about how I was asking her to be on her legs (not to over-stabilize the hips by pushing the pelvis forward). She had been trained to push the pelvis forward onto the legs, and I was asking her to stay back. I have had the experience of losing dancers, especially Graham or classical ballet dancers, over this issue. They just think I'm wrong, and are not willing to take the time to experiment with something that is in seeming disagreement with their dance training. Eva hung out, and figured out what I was after. She still has the choice to do the old thing, but she now has another possibility. It is interesting how people think that if they learn something new, they will lose the old way. This is perhaps because they don't really know how they are doing something, it is just automatic. Like a baseball pitcher who, coming back from an injury, struggles to find his old motion.

Also, I was able to work with these two dancers in a very quiet manner, using only direction. With most students, fairly strong guidance is usually necessary to get them to a place where you can do quieter work. With these two, most of my work was on myself, to sustain a level of use that they could respond to. This sounds like crap to those not involved in the work, but it is really the sine qua non of the Alexander Technique: it takes good use to communicate good use. Trying to do something to somebody is not the way to help them find a state of potential.

I asked Lawrence if the study had influenced his thinking on the technique in any way and he replied: “Keeping a journal on the sessions helped me clarify the material we worked on, and, in some cases, enabled to clarify my conception of the technique and how it is taught.” This is evident in one of his journal entries, written about half-way through the study:

I spoke a bit about inhibition and direction. My thinking on this subject has led me to a new understanding or, at least, new conceptual model for explaining these concepts and it has led me to a possible explanation of how the application approach in the A.T. proceeds in comparison with the classical model expressed in chair work. How I explained this to Jacqueline is as follows. When one inhibits the immediate response to a stimulus, one stops the postural set preparing one for a particular act, and returns to a kind of neutral or habitual resting state. Generally speaking, the postural set reflects the habitual resting state, in that the tendency to pull the head back and down while at rest becomes more evident with increased effort. Therefore, someone who pulls his head back and down when moving is usually simply adding effort to a poorly organized resting state. The value of working on an activity is that, in the preparatory set, one can recognize oneself. If one can learn to recognize muscle hardening in preparation for an act, one is halfway to recognizing muscle hardening that is present always. So, after inhibiting the immediate response to the stimulus, in the classical Alexander model, the next step is to decide to do nothing, but to work on sending the directions that will not only prevent the postural set, but will also improve the habitual resting state. So, in the classical model, one spends a fair amount of time, as did Alexander, not trying to do anything, using directions to undo learned imbalance in postural tonus, and only when this is clearly accomplished does one go on to apply the new use in very simple actions, such as moving forward and backwards in the chair. However, it is also possible to learn to prevent the habitual increase in effort preparatory to movement, and then to go ahead and do the movement with the old organization supporting it. One will wind up with a less effortful movement, but one will not change, in any profound way, the underlying organization of the self. This is what I believe is happening in the application approach to the Alexander Technique, in which students are encouraged to immediately apply the technique to an activity. They do in fact see improvement in the activity, but it is simply a diminution of effort, and not the deeper change in global posture that is possible with the classical work in non-doing.

The application approach that Lawrence refers to is a method of immediately attempting to apply the Alexander concepts to the student's chosen activity. For example, a violinist would immediately work on playing the violin within the session. This method is most often seen in the United States, among students of Marjorie Barstow, who was the first of Alexander's graduates to teach in the United States. It differs from the classical model, which Richmond (1994) described as follows:

In a traditional private lesson, the student will practice inhibition and direction, the basic principle of the Alexander Technique, while working with simple movements such as getting in and out of a chair. [...] While getting in and out of a chair, the student is asked not to react immediately to the instruction to sit, but instead to prevent the habitual response of preparatory muscular activity and pay attention to the primary head/neck/back relationship that is the essential condition for improved use. (p. 33)

Finally, I asked Lawrence what he would do differently and why, if he could undertake anew this study.

Well, I can't at this moment think of anything that I would 'do' differently, in the hands-on work, at least. But, based on the experience of the group meeting we had, I might be more inclined to ask the dancers about themselves and about what they were experiencing more. It might have been useful to know, when it was being experienced, some of what came out in the group meeting.

He stated that he thought that he sometimes wrongly assumed that if the student didn't understand something, she would ask about it. Perhaps a study could be constructed in which the participants could meet together and discuss what was happening more often during the study. As a researcher, I felt most connected to the study and to the participants when we had our informal quartet interview, towards the end of the study, so I will consider this in structuring any future research that I undertake.

3.4 Experience of participants in the sessions

In this section, Experience of participants in the sessions, I will describe the experience of the dancer participants within the sessions, where it is most likely that change will originate. I will include the comments of the practitioner when they serve to elucidate the process that the dancers describe. This is particularly important because it is within the sessions that one may

first note the progression in understanding and integration of the principles of the Alexander Technique. I will describe the experience of the practitioner in a separate section.

3.41 Muscular feedback

Both dancers relate their experiences in their sessions as confusing or destabilizing when their usual sensations of movement were either no longer present or were quite different. In our second interview, Eva commented on the subject: “I’m used to working with the body in a very direct way, asking my muscles to do something, whereas here I’m asking my bones to move in a certain direction, and I feel like this is sort of indirect, at least I don’t have concrete responses.” She goes on to relate that she does not have the usual sensation when she does not have the habitual response to a movement: “I don’t feel my muscles firing. So it is difficult for me to know if I am ‘doing it’ or not.” And Jacqueline wrote, early in her journal: “This ‘minimum effort’ is confusing. For me, the notion of effort represents a reference point in the movement. Effort establishes muscularly the sensation of movement” (App. E, #6). In other words, she uses the sensation of effort to inform her about the movement itself.

In the preceding statements, both dancers expressed their difficulty in moving without the familiar sense of effort that usually accompanied their actions – the sense of the “muscles firing”. Toward the end of the study, their comments changed to reflect a growing understanding that they could be guided by other than the habitual sense of muscular tension, and that with the Alexander Technique they were cultivating “an open awareness of the body”. Jacqueline wrote in her journal: “Keep in mind opening, expansion and lengthening and allow the body to be available to this. Cultivate an open attention to the body to dissolve blockages or crystallizations in movement. It is a Titanic endeavor, growing from simple principles” (App. E, #7). This expresses a fairly clear understanding of what needs to be done and how it can be done, as well as the difficulty presented by the habitual postural set, which she very nicely describes as “crystallization in the movement.” Jones (1976), writing on the postural set, or the unconscious muscular preparation that precedes movement, wrote:

When a stimulus is presented for the first time, many responses are available, including not making response at all. If one of these responses is selected and learned, it can be repeated without loss of choice as long as the process remains conscious. If it drops below the level of consciousness, a “set” will be established linking the stimulus with the response, which will then occur automatically whether it is appropriate or not. When the “set” is well established, a presentation of stimulus will result in less tonic activity in both the sensory system (through habituation of the orienting reaction) and the motor system (through automatization). The result is a habit which operates unconsciously (like an innate reflex) and which is resistant to change. Inhibition raises the level of tonic activity in the nervous system, brings the operation of the habit to a conscious level, and restores choice (including the choice of making the original response). (p. 150)

For Jacqueline, the notion of cultivating an open awareness of the body as a means of dissolving blockages or “crystallization in the movement”, shows that she has begun to look for something outside her old preconceived idea of initiation of movement. Eva clearly stated this, in our final interview:

I think it has become clearer to me what we are doing in the session, that the physical response is clearer, so even though I don't have muscle feedback, I'm getting more fluid movement – I have an easier time doing that movement. I think it is also about shifting what I am looking for... [...] there can be all sorts of feedback that come from the body.

I believe that, in dance, as in other aspects of life, the need is often felt to relate something new to something already known, as if the unknown is too disturbing or even frightening without a clear connection to our current understanding. Thus, we tend to place new movements on top of old, adding new muscular effort instead of building anew. We depend on familiar sensations generated by dependable habits. But placing too much attention on familiar muscular sensation limits movement potential by locking one into habit. In the Alexander Technique, the concept of faulty sensory kinesthesia is predominant in pedagogy for many reasons. What feels right to us is probably what we do habitually. In order to modify a pattern of movement one has to acknowledge that it may feel wrong for a period of time. Alexander (1984) wrote,

[...] since our particular way of reacting to stimuli is in accordance with our familiar habits of use, the incentive to try to gain any given end is inextricably bound up with this familiar use. [...] As long as the conditions of use and the associated feeling are wrong in a person, the incentive to gain a given end by the familiar wrong use appears to be almost irresistible. (p. 45)

He stated further that, “People don’t do what they feel to be wrong when they are trying to be right” (Alexander, 1986, p. 109). At one point, Eva wrote about becoming aware of the undue tension that she placed in her arm and hand when writing. She wrote that when she attempted to write without the familiar excessive tension, she felt like she was losing control of the pencil.

The following statements from Eva further demonstrate the difficulty she experienced in attempting to move without engaging her habitual patterns. In her journal entry from the ninth session, she wrote: “I have been noticing two things this week. First of all, my neck feels loose which isn’t entirely comfortable. If I move my head back and forth quickly, my skull seems to float around. Maybe it is my neck refusing the tension that I usually engage to move quickly.” In Lawrence’s journal entry relating to the same session with Eva, we read: “I think this was the first time that I felt she could sustain her head neck directions without my continued contact.” Eva went further in our second interview, commenting on trying to move without the familiar tension in her neck: “[...] this lack of stability I feel [...] doesn’t bother me when I’m just in regular life, but if I try to move my head quickly back and forth [demonstrates], well, now it’s fine, but for a while it just felt like it was uncomfortable to do it, it made me not want to do it.” She described how she felt in one of her own rehearsals when she attempted to demonstrate a movement to the dancers:

[...] I went ‘whoa’ -- I don’t want to do that today, it felt like there was too much mobility in my neck to permit that movement. [...] I talked to Lawrence about it afterwards and he suggested that it maybe just feels different because there is not a sort of tension there that I’m used to so it feels less stable, but it is just the tension that is gone...

Over the course of the sessions there was obvious change in the level of tension in Eva’s neck, as she and Lawrence mentioned in their journals. The sensory information she initially got from her neck as it became freer was interpreted as a lack of stability, a sensation she found uncomfortable. Yet she trusted that she was heading in a positive direction. This trust, along with a desire to change and a willingness to experiment with the unfamiliar is a prerequisite for further change. She trusted that what then felt wrong might be right. Richmond (1994), in an article entitled “The Alexander Technique in Dance”, analyzed this phenomenon:

The calibration of sensory awareness to the standard of the familiar means that we cannot depend on our kinesthetic sensations to tell us what we are really doing. We have a belief in a certain degree of muscle tension being necessary to perform an activity. We wait until we experience that feeling before we go ahead and perform that activity. We need to feel that feeling before we go ahead and perform that activity. We need to feel that feeling in order to know “all is correct”. Unfamiliar use and an unfamiliar degree of muscle tension will feel strange, even wrong. Therefore there is a strong unconscious pull to revert to familiar sensations of misuse that feel right. (p. 28)

As Merleau-Ponty (1998) wrote: “Sensation, once introduced as an element of understanding, does not leave us the choice of response”¹⁵ (p. 20).

One can infer from this the importance of the role of the practitioner in accompanying students in the process of change, a subject I touched on in the methodology chapter. The practitioner must encourage students to explore the unfamiliar and to trust that distancing themselves from the familiar, when that familiar represents habitual misuse, will lead eventually to improvement in overall functioning.

3.42 Reactions to change

One can easily imagine the difficulties, the stumbling blocks that dancers will encounter when they attempt to apply this concept in a rehearsal situation. Faulty kinesthesia alone would seem manageable, but, along with pleasant sensations of ease, lightness and increased energy, students of the Alexander Technique often report unpleasant sensations that can accompany change, among them nausea and dizziness, exhaustion, deep pain, and persistent shaking from muscular release. I encouraged the participant dancers to speak of such experiences, should they occur. I chose to include Lawrence’s past experience, as well as my own, to present the reader with a broader sampling on this subject.

¹⁵ “La sensation une fois introduite comme élément de la connaissance, ne nous laisse pas le choix de la réponse.”

Lawrence spoke of the many discomforts that he experienced during his training to become a teacher of the Alexander Technique:

First, of course, is the pain that is presented when habitual over-tone in a muscle is reduced. Apparently, a muscle subjected to constant contraction ceases to send nerve feedback to the brain about its condition – in other words, it hurts, but we cannot feel it. Sometimes the pain I felt seemed like it came from deep in the bone – I remember this especially in relation to the clavicles. Then, one gets into a condition in which the old use feels quite uncomfortable, but the new use is not yet quite manageable – a sort of no-man’s-land between the old and the new. We used to call this “Alexander’s gloom”. Occasionally one would feel like one had torn a muscle – a calf muscle, for example -- only to begin a day or two later having the same experience in the other calf. This I experienced as my soleus and gastrocnemius muscles differentiated, accompanied by some tearing of fascial tissue. I had to be very attentive for a week or two, then found that I was running and walking better. At one point, I would awaken several times a night when I would tighten my neck, which I could keep relatively free when I was conscious. Eventually, I was able to stop tightening my neck while I slept, as though a certain element of consciousness remained active, even in sleep.

Eva wrote in her journal about the uncomfortable sensations she experienced in many sessions at the beginning of the study. She described this further in an interview: “One of the first things that happened, in the first session, is that I got very dizzy. And it has been going on for many of the session – not all of the time – but I find when Lawrence is working on my neck and my shoulder, especially my left shoulder, I suddenly get quite dizzy.” She experienced dizziness for six weeks (for all but one of the first 12 sessions). She described the reaction as: “The dizziness rushes quite suddenly. I lose vision in my eyes and feel cold in the head. All goes back to normal as soon as I lie down.” Eva expressed how she felt in one of the sessions, in which she did not experience the dizziness (the seventh session): “What a pleasure! Today’s session felt like a special treat for my body. For the first time I wasn’t dizzy at all.” The dizziness returned, however, and recurred until the 13th session. In reference to one of the last sessions she stated, “I seem to be done with dizziness at least for the time being. I find I am enjoying more and more the Alexander sessions which often leave me in a euphoric state. I still often get sleepy in mid-session.”

Lawrence commented on Eva's dizziness in his journal. After the first session with her he wrote: "She had dizziness almost immediately. Within minutes of my working on her neck. I felt she was wondering what she had gotten herself in for." Then, after the ninth session, he wrote:

Early in the session, I talked about getting a sense of the shoulders being supported by mobile ribs, and I worked a little on helping Eva to open her upper torso, underneath the shoulders. I felt her breathing change and her shoulders release outwards. As I was working on Eva's neck, it occurred to me that I should not work too quickly, that she would get dizzy if I did, and I shifted to the arms and shoulders, starting with the right side, which is more released. When I worked on Eva's left shoulder, however, she got dizzy. I tried to stop and leave her seated on the stool, hoping it would quiet down, but she had to lie on the table.

In an interview, when I asked him about the dizziness, he said that it was fairly common for students to experience some kind of dizziness, nausea or feeling of faintness and he compared it to motion sickness:

We don't really know exactly what causes this, but we can theorize that it results from a disruption of the habitual use of the vestibular system – that it is, in effect, a kind of motion sickness. All of the symptoms of motion sickness seem to be present: dizziness, nausea, sweating and clammy skin. Carsickness occurs when the visual does not accord with other aspects of the vestibular system. The body senses motion, but the eyes see the immediate environment (the car's interior, or a book) as immobile. Some people develop strategies of balance that depend greatly on visual input, perhaps due to sinus problems that make the inner ear less dependable. Vertigo is an example of this, when the perceived environment is too distant for the eyes to dependably judge the body's relationship to it. It doesn't happen to all, because not all use the visual as their dominant balance strategy.

Why this dizziness occurs in an Alexander session is not known, but Lawrence posits his possible explanation, based on these balance strategies:

In the case of Eva (or other dancers with whom I have worked who experienced dizziness) one could theorize that she achieves a certain dependable sense of stability through the use of a certain control pattern in her neck, that a certain level of muscle tone constitutes an element of her strategy for balancing, and that the absence of that familiar tension produced motion sickness. Some students will occasionally have what appears to be sudden hypotension when they make a change in postural muscle tone. It is interesting that, in Eva's case, the dizziness could be brought on simply by working on her left shoulder (she is left handed). I have found that it is very common for people to gain a faulty sense of control (of balance or movement) through the contraction of the

dominant arm, primarily through the pectoral muscles. Eva's pattern of postural control seems to involve the head, neck and shoulder together, and can be released from any point within the complex. It is not a case of extreme contraction or muscle hardening, but something quite subtle, which would not be apparent to most observers. She is simply accustomed to using a certain state of muscle tone to achieve balance. Without it, her field of balance is temporarily disturbed, but quickly rights itself. Usually, once the absence of the control pattern is accepted, the dizziness no longer occurs. In fact, balance often seems to improve dramatically when the neck becomes freer.

Jacqueline did not experience this dizziness, or indeed any particular discomfort directly related to the Alexander sessions. She did report on the sustained relief that she experienced, through the application of the Alexander Technique, from chronic discomforts. For example, after her 14th session, Jacqueline wrote on the subject in her journal:

This made me realize that it has been a while since I felt the "gripping" in my back, a sign of fatigue and overwork that I sometimes feel. At the same time, I have not had the headache that is caused by excess tension on the right side of my neck. I usually notice this discomfort every three weeks or so, upon arising. This can take up to 48 hours to dissipate. This headache, which borders upon migraine, I have only experienced once since the beginning of this study. Even if I do not always maintain ideal posture, the sessions themselves and moments of awareness of this region outside of the sessions, seem to bring a certain release. (App. E, #8)

In our last interview, she stated that in the 10 weeks of the study, she experienced only one migraine:

During the 10 weeks of Alexander Technique sessions, I have only experienced this once. I spoke to Lawrence about this. During the session it diminished, and, this time it lasted less than 48 hours. Since then, I haven't had it. It has been at least five weeks that I have not had this pain in the neck. That is clear progress. (App. E, #9)

She attributed this diminution of migraine, along with the disappearance of a chronic discomfort under her right scapula (that she experienced when very tired), to the study of the Alexander Technique. Lawrence saw Jacqueline three months after the end of the study period. Though she had had no further sessions with him, she reported that she had had no recurrence of migraine. She stated that the pattern of tension that usually signaled the onset of migraine had not recurred, and that when she felt the beginning of a headache, she was able to prevent its full manifestation by working on herself as she had learned from the Alexander work.

In my own experience in training to become a teacher of the Alexander Technique, I recall a long period of time during which I would awaken in the middle of the night, because I was experiencing unnecessary tension in my neck. I remember, as well, a period of perhaps two weeks during which I would shake uncontrollably when trying to bend my legs. This shaking subsided only when I managed to change my thinking in relation to the action, and took a different approach to it. I managed to get out of the habitual pattern, which was not easy, considering how ingrained and frequently engaged the pattern was. It was a wonderful discovery! I also, like Jacqueline, experienced relief from chronic pain associated with patterns of misuse.

3.43 Awareness, sensation and direction.

The section “Awareness, sensation and direction” looks more closely at some of the basic principles of the Alexander Technique. The three concepts that are most apparent in the data that I have collected from the participant dancers are faulty sensory perception (which was discussed in the previous section under muscular feedback), primary control, and direction. I reiterate that these concepts, along with the concepts of recognition of force of habit and inhibition, are essential and interconnected aspects of the Alexander Technique. When asked which of the concepts was clearest to them, the dancers both spoke about the primary control, which they wrote about in their journals. This topic will be covered in a later section on strategies applied to rehearsal and dance situations.

When asked about what changes she was experiencing in self-awareness with this study, Eva spoke of awareness of specific areas, the level of tension in these areas, and of directing herself without the addition of excessive tension:

I think there are several opening awarenesses ... just generally consciousness in the neck and shoulder region... finer attention to when there is tension there, [...] I think I'm more aware of it as I go through my day, in different activities that I am doing. There is an awareness of finding length without tension. I don't know if this is awareness, or rather a way of working. I am aware of generally not holding too much tension in the body, working more simply, and I am trying to be aware of when I am using more than what needs to be used. We have been working a lot since the last

interview on the directions in space, especially in sitting and standing movement, and this awareness of the directions in the limbs – the feet going down, the heels going back, the knees going forward, the back going back, the head going forward – those directions as the tools for moving have been quite interesting. I find that thinking of spatial directions for the body helps me to move without engaging muscles. It feels magical sometimes, as if the limbs didn't need the muscles to move. There is another force at work.

Jacqueline reported that, although the Alexander Technique session did not dramatically alter her body awareness, she did become more aware of her muscular habits related to a chronic lower back injury. She reported that she was able, with the technique, to use her thinking to release unnecessary compression, and to move while maintaining more length in her lower back. She stated, "I have noticed that I feel more freedom and ease when I think more of length, when I proceed by lengthening from the head" (App.E, #10).

The following statements from Jacqueline demonstrate the progression in her understanding on the subject of awareness, sensation, and direction. She commented on the subject of kinesthetic awareness after her third session:

I like to rely on sensation. But when it is new, I like to be confirmed in this sensation by the teacher, the rehearsal director, the choreographer and, at times by Lawrence in the Alexander Technique session. I speak to Lawrence about sensation (it is a point of reference, a guiding point, a foundation of learning). He clarifies this by speaking more of direction. This idea of direction refers not to sensation, but to attention that is constantly renewed. Sensation refers to the past, to memory, whereas the intention of direction is constantly renewed, maintained, adjusted during movement, changes in level and displacements. Don't freeze anything, don't attach to anything. Allow, open. Inhibit the reflex, the habit by through direction. Maintain an open and alive awareness. (App. E, #11)

Early in her journal, Jacqueline also wrote on direction, and how she related it to her dancing:

The idea of direction is harmonious with my way of being in my dancing body, with my way of dancing. I very much define myself in my dancing by my relationship to space, by the space which traverses my body, and by the shapes that I sculpt with space. Space is often a motivation for my displacement, for my changes in level. It is by taking advantage of varied directions, combined or opposed, that I believe I can create amplitude in my movement and in my lines. (App. E, #12)

Much later in her journal, after session 13, she returned to the topic of sensation versus direction. Here she relates Lawrence's point of view regarding preconceived goals or ideas of how something should feel, and how these preconceptions can limit the process of exploration of new possibilities:

Lawrence asks me to see where expansion can take me. To not have a preconceived idea of the "place" where I am going. This seems like an important key to the Alexander Technique. And this reminds me of the first conversation that I had with Lawrence regarding sensation and trusting in sensation. Lawrence warned me against looking for a comfortable place, of looking for a familiar sensation which, eventually, will prevent me from discovering possibilities. (App. E, #13)

Lawrence replied, when I asked him in an interview to speak about familiar sensation:

It is always difficult to ask people to move outside of familiar, dependable sensation. We don't want to tell people that everything they feel is incorrect, but it must be understood that change is not going to come through the familiar, and that letting go of familiar sensation is a necessary step if one wishes to explore new possibilities. It is all an experiment, after all.

In our informal "quartet" interview, myself and all three participants together, Jacqueline reported having the experience of giving performances in which she felt distinctly "off", only to receive a very positive response from both audience and other dancers. All four of us acknowledged having had similar experiences in our performing careers. Lawrence and I agreed that perhaps abandoning familiar habitual muscular tension (which might happen, for example, in a state of extreme fatigue) might allow for something new and perhaps better to occur in a performance, while at the same time leaving us without the sensory bearings to assess the effectiveness of what we were doing.

Of course one of the aspects of the study of the Alexander Technique is kinesthetic reeducation. One can make sensory awareness more dependable. According to many authors (among them Bainbridge Cohen, 1995; Feldenkrais, 1972, 1998; and Hanna, 1976) an important element of somatic learning is the development of self-awareness, which informs the student on many levels. This sensory awareness could be a sense of the tone in muscles, it could be a sense of the interrelation of the body parts, it could be a sense of the body in space (in relation to gravity and air pressure, for example) or it could relate to internal organ sensations (breathing, pulse, etc.). I think that the danger in following sensation is in the

tendency to get lost in sensation and become overloaded by sensory input, and it is here that the Alexander Technique offers a unique contribution to the field of somatics. The goal in the Alexander Technique is to select really useful information and use it to foster conscious self-direction. One thus learns to become more aware of certain muscular responses without getting lost in the sensation they carry, and to develop cognitive strategies to increase efficiency and (in the case of performers) expressivity. I believe that self-awareness, as understood in the Alexander Technique, could be explored and developed in dance training in order to facilitate self-engagement and change. Beaulieu (1996) refers to this when she analyzes the teaching of an experienced dance teacher: “For Peggy, responsibility through body awareness is indeed closely linked with autonomy. She feels that dancers need to be able to define their needs with regards to what is appropriate for themselves in class.” (p. 72) The concepts of self-reliance and self-authority, which have been explored in education in works by Dewey (1938, 1957, 1980), Perrenoud (1998, 1999) and others, and in dance education by Eddy (2002), Green (1999, 2000), Long (2002), and Stinson (1984), will be covered more thoroughly in the next two sections.

3.5 Application in dance

In this section, I will analyze data that reveals the application of the Alexander Technique to dance, as well as data that, at the time of the study, suggested possible future application. The goal of my study was to describe the experience of two professional contemporary dancers studying Alexander Technique and applying it in their dancing. From the outset, due to the limited time frame of the study period (10 weeks), I anticipated the dancers would have only limited success in immediately applying what they were learning to dancing. The data collected from the dancers confirms this expectation, but suggests cognitive changes in their strategies, as well as changes in some fundamental movements which the dancers viewed as leading to a future integration the Alexander Technique principles in their dancing.

3.51 Attention to process

Attention to process emerges from the interviews and journals of the two participant dancers. The following observation, which Jacqueline made in her journal, shows her growing attention to the process:

I have the impression that everything becomes better organized with less effort. There is a better chance that the pelvis will place itself in suspension over the legs. It seems that not concentrating my attention and effort in the pelvic region allows (rather than forces) it to find its alignment and to fall with its natural weight. Also, I do not force a realignment of my pelvis, but I create the vertical space to allow it to find its place over the legs, while remaining in harmony with the spine and the head. (App. E, #14)

Here, she is keeping her awareness on the primary control and working through the use of *directions*, rather than *end-gaining* by trying to position her parts according to a sense of proper placement. Her use of the word “allow” demonstrates a change in her process and in what she seeks.

Later, Jacqueline wrote of her lack of success in applying the Alexander principles when she was preoccupied in dance rehearsal:

In other sequences, more vertical or more rapid, I am still too preoccupied by the search for various points of initiation of movement, such as the shoulder or the knees or the hip (then to let myself follow the repercussion of this initiation) to remain connected to the primary control, as I have understood and experienced it in the session and in everyday movements. (App. E, #15)

She chose instead a way of working little by little, so that she would not grow too discouraged by the difficulty of applying her changing use to everything, and she took a very *non-endgaining* approach to the study, deciding not to anticipate results: “I opt for an approach of small doses in order not to become obsessive or completely discouraged. I conceive of the link between Alexander and dance as a exploration that leaves the field open to many possibilities, for discovery, but also for fumbling and lack of results” (App. E, #16).

Eva made reference to a similar shift in thinking. In an interview, she spoke of the often *end-gaining* attitude that one adopts in rehearsal: “What happens in rehearsal often is a certain, just wanting to get something done, get something learned. [...] you want to get them [the

dancers] to execute a movement or learn a piece of choreography, to teach a piece of choreography... and not let that turn into tension, which it often adds.”

After her 16th session, she wrote about the Alexander Technique: “I think I can still learn from this. The key seems to me (at least in the short-term) in letting go of the result, in shifting the desire to succeed out of the first place in the list of priorities. How I would love to dance with such simplicity.” Later, after her 18th session, she recalled her experience of taking a dance class with a guest teacher: “Class this week with Angelik Wilke has been very interesting. The class itself focuses on the process of the movement rather than any sort of line or end product. I find that, with the Alexander work so fresh in mind and body, I settle very naturally into this approach.” In our final interview, Eva stated that the Alexander Technique had changed her thinking about how she approaches dance. She remarked: “The concentration on process, as a means to get to an end – rather than getting to the end and then working backwards is a new way of thinking for me. [...] To let the body find its own clarity and to guide it away from unnecessary effort seems to me to be the innovation of the Alexander Technique.”

Lawrence made the following comments in response to a question I posed about process:

If one goes directly for an end or a specific goal, one will prepare in an habitual manner, and will follow the habitual procedure one has learned for achieving that goal. Even trying to do something differently will only result in adding more effort to an already initiated habitual postural set. If one wishes to alter behavior that one deems unsuccessful -- either because the outcome is not what is wished, or because the means used to achieve the end require misplaced and injurious effort -- then one must learn to follow a more process oriented approach. That means that one must reason out the process which will lead to accomplishing the desired goal in a new manner. Then one must decide not to accomplish the goal or end one has decided upon, but one must follow step-by-step the new means decided on for accomplishing the goal. Only in this way can one circumvent the habitual postural set which is unconsciously initiated in relation to an act. The advantages of this kind of process-oriented thinking are manifold, for example, it leads to a more available and open condition that can easily adapt to changing circumstances, which is certainly desirable in dance, where conditions change from performance to performance.

It seems, judging from the dancers comments, that Lawrence has communicated this idea about process to the dancers.

Process has been extensively written about and analyzed in all of Alexander's books (1984, 1985, 1986, 1988). Dewey (1938, 1957, 1980) has also written at length on the subject, especially in relation to education. Researchers in sports performance (Krim, 1993) and music (Kaplan, 1994; Tabish, 1995; and Knaub, 1999) have also tackled the subject of *ending*. Dewey (1957) proposed that:

Means and ends are two names for the same reality. The terms denote a division in reality but a distinction in judgment. [...] To think of the end signifies to extend and enlarge our view of the act to be performed. It means to look at the next act in perspective, not permitting it to occupy the entire field of vision. To bear the end in mind signifies that we should not stop thinking about our next act until we form some reasonable clear idea of the course of action to which it commits us. To attain a remote end means on the other hand to treat the end as a series of means. [...] We must change what is to be done into a how, the means whereby. The end thus re-appears as a series of "what nexts", and the what next of chief importance is the one nearest the present state of the one acting. (p. 35)

Several Alexander practitioners who have written on dance (Batson, 1990, 1993; Oliver, 1994; White, 1993) have pointed out how dance education is too often geared towards the production of pre-established results, which tends to create difficulties for dancers, including failure to perform to expectation, lack of confidence, excessive tension, and often, chronic injury.

In our final interview, Jacqueline, when asked to describe how she integrated the Alexander Technique into her rehearsal work, acknowledged that it was in her training that she could most easily apply the Alexander Technique to dance. Because she trains by herself, it was easier for her to stop, take time and experiment with the concept she was working with in the Alexander sessions. She stated:

In rehearsal, it is much more difficult. It is possible at times. [...] It was possible when I broke down movements and when I went at my own rhythm. From the moment that I was able to attack new sequences with consciousness of certain ideas from Alexander, notably the primary control, at that moment I could sense a difference in the activity, in the speed and continuity. But, before this, it took time and much trial and error with the new material to make use of these ideas. (App. E, #17)

The difficulty here expressed by Jacqueline is certainly fairly familiar to any dancer attempting to apply the Alexander Technique to his work. How often does a dancer have time when learning new material to experiment and progressively own the movement? While process may have its importance in dance creation, it often disappears in the teaching of choreography.

I believe that dance often requires a level of physicality and quickness of performance that resembles that required of athletes. Jowitt (1988) wrote on current virtuosic dancing which “[...] presents the dancers as super athletes or sleek projectiles hurtling through the air or quick-witted components of a complicated pattern, much of it seeming to draw its imagery from modern technology – from rockets and missiles and computers” (p. 372). A shift has occurred in professional dance training to accommodate the greater physical demands placed on dancers by some of today’s choreographers. I believe that the end product of this orientation towards technical results is a diminution of approaches that favor self exploration and expressivity in dance. A balance must be struck between the search for high levels of gymnastic and technical expertise, with the continuing exploration of means for developing expressivity, sensitivity and individuality in the dancer. How can we expect all of these qualities to mysteriously appear together onstage without having made them an integral part of the training process? The expressive artist has undergone some process of self-exploration beyond the imitation and recapitulation of shapes and gestures that is the most emphasized portion of dance training. Certainly, the inclusion of somatics in the training of dancers has emerged and evolved in many settings, but we have to question our motivation – is it only to better achieve the pyrotechnics required in much of today’s dance? Are we, when presenting material from somatic methods within the dance class setting, reducing the material to a series of pre-determined exercises – what I call “somatricks”? Or are we presenting somatic principles along with the philosophy that underlies them, so that there is real understanding, and with that understanding, a chance to apply somatics more broadly - in all realms, not just in dance mechanics?

3.52 Strategy

In this section on strategy, I will look at the dancers and their understanding and application of the concept of *primary control*. In interviews and in their journals, both dancers acknowledged the primary control as the concept of the Alexander Technique that they most clearly understood. The following is a quotation from Jacqueline, describing her interpretation and application of the *primary control* in the execution of a plié:

I realize that I first think of primary control, then, I initiate by the knees towards the exterior following the line of my turnout, as if I was operated like a marionette, and my thinking is directed along the posterior line of my thighs. These three thoughts proceed one atop the other, that is, when I think of the back of the thighs, I still sustain the direction of the head and the direction of the knees forward. This works for the descent in “grand plié”. For the ascent, an action with consciousness of the primary control allows my legs and my pelvis to re-organize standing with turnout in first or in second position. (App. E, #18)

After what she describes as a very intense and tiring rehearsal, Jacqueline arrived for an evening session of Alexander work. She described how she felt as: “My body is like a ‘patchwork’ of zones of stiffness.” She went on to relate what happened in the session:

In the standing work, I ended by sensing the head-neck joint! A sense of globality is gradually beginning to appear. But I have difficulty letting go in the legs. I recognize the little forward push in my lumbar vertebrae. This reflex action restricts and tightens my psoas. The sense of depth of the pelvis is more difficult to nurture when I shorten the space at the front of my hips. (App. E. #19)

The following day in rehearsal, she noted the same tendency when she initiated certain movements:

The following day, in rehearsal, I notice that I reproduce this forward push of the lumbar region in movements of rotation of the torso in a variety of situations: legs bent, legs bent and crossed, in the large 4th position, supported on an arm with the pelvis raised. I also notice this tilt-push in the lumbar region when I do the following turn: tour en-dehors, en dégage derrière, on a bent supporting leg, to which is added a sharp movement of the two arms to the right and then to the left. The force of the arms from side to side with one leg back, weakens the lengthening of my lumbar region, causing the unpleasant sensation of compression and pinching. I redo these movements, one by one, recreating a dimension of depth in the pelvis (that is, with awareness of the background of my sacrum in opposition with the knees) and lengthening from the head. (App. E, #20)

She concluded by noting that this process was difficult to accomplish every time, but she stated “I have the sense of partial release. It is promising. Continue this approach” (App. E, #18).

In the preceding entry, Jacqueline recognizes that she initiates many movements with a postural set that includes a forward contraction of her lumbar spine, an action which causes her discomfort. She writes of this action as being reflexive, and she analyzes the strategy which she used to modify this pattern. She breaks down the movement and looks not to reproduce a sensation, but to create a dimension of depth in her pelvis by consciously directing opposition between her pelvis and her knees in relation to her primary control. This awareness and this approach to problem solving require time and motivation on the part of the dancer. Jacqueline has an acute sensitivity in this area, partly due to a recurrent injury/discomfort in her lower back. This was, as she mentioned, one of her motivations for participating in this study. From personal experience, I can state that pain or injury is a frequent motivator towards the questioning and resolution of habitual patterns. Dimon (1999), Jones (1976), Krim (1994), and Westfeld (1986) make similar observations in their writing. Of course Alexander developed his method as he himself was in search of a solution to his persistent vocal strain. It is unfortunate that we often don't question our way of doing until we experience pain or injury. There are usually signs of malfunction that can be read before an injury has occurred or become chronic.

As I mentioned earlier, Eva was not rehearsing intensely during the period of this study, but she did continue to take class, and had several observations to make on how the Alexander Technique might affect her dancing:

I think I'm going to feel it in longer term, the effects on my dancing. What I would like, and what I see the potential for is a way of working more efficiently, of doing things with less effort, of getting rapidity without tension, which is always a challenge for me because I'm big and tall – it's always a challenge for me to move fast, so what I tend to do is just tone everything. But I think that with this work I could learn ways to do this without the extra tension.

Baker, quoted in Beaulieu (1996), spoke of peeling away the extra layers of unnecessary tension in training: “We want to take away extra tension because then the core of the thing shows. Each thing that we add arbitrarily obscures us and obscures the movement itself. [...] We want to peel the unnecessary layers away and do something pure, clear and individual” (p. 72).

To complement her idea of working more efficiently and without the excessive tension, Eva added that:

[...] with that letting go of tension goes a letting go of a certain willful side of dancing—always wanting to be good, judging what we are doing. I would like to, and that goes with the Alexander Technique, Alexander contributes to it, a sort of letting go of willfulness and just dancing... not adding extra tension, extra expectation to a certain movement, just diving in to the movement itself.

She wrote about the activity of writing with excessive tension as being similar to that of dancing with excessive tension:

It is funny how tension, like in writing, tension gives a sense of control, and I feel the same thing dancing, especially when I am learning something new and I don't know exactly what I'm doing, but sometimes I will get myself into a state of tension and I will feel that I've got control of something – at least, just my own body (laughs)... But sort of just not letting that happen, staying released, and I think it would put me in a better disposition to rehearse, because the tension is tiring, sort of aggravating – gets one cranky...(laughs) with... the other dancers. So I think, the little bit I've been doing, I've noticed it is just that I'm not going to have more control if I'm tense, it's an illusion, that if I am just there it will be just as good...

Jacqueline mentioned that the study of the Alexander Technique hadn't changed her thinking about dance, but she stated: “I sense that a different way of being in my body is developing” (App. E, #19). Karczag (in Harris, 1998) remarked, “I am interested in the place where it is no longer a technique, but it is you” (p. 40).

3.53 Application to choreography

During a rehearsal with dancers on whom she was choreographing, Eva became acutely aware of how much tension some dancers were creating in their necks. She wrote: “With the Alexander work very much on my mind I begin to notice extra tension in my dancers’ necks. I find myself often asking them to soften their necks. In some cases, my desire to see released necks actually changes the choreography.” She noted that some of the dancers had studied the Alexander Technique, and that they seemed most able to make the change that she was requesting. “The dancers that have studied Alexander seem to be able to adjust when I ask them to soften their necks, whereas the others don’t seem to recognize that there is tension there.” In one of our interviews, Eva noted that the dancers began to respond to comments about neck tension by asking if she had just come from her Alexander lesson.

In our final interview, when asked if the study had affected her sense of aesthetics in dance, she replied positively. She explained: “Partly just spending so much time focusing on that area, means that, when I am looking at dancers, I am looking at their necks, and those tensions really jump out at me, whereas, they probably wouldn’t have before. So yes, I think it has shifted my... my appreciation.” When I asked her if she could clarify what she meant by appreciation, she said, “My eyes have begun to really see when there is extra tension in the body, so that ‘appreciation’ comes from seeing the body move efficiently and without extra work getting in the way of the purity of the movement.” She stated that she had become less tolerant and somehow uncomfortable with excess body tension around her. When I asked her if this was purely a visual response, or if she in fact sensed the tension (kinesthetic empathy), she replied: “Yes, I do, and with non-dancers it is even more extreme. Often I see somebody with their shoulders up around their ears that have just lived their lives that way. I’ve always been sensitive to that... but I think... even more so now. I often seem to feel their tension in my own neck.”

I believe that this new sensitivity could alter the demands that Eva, as choreographer, makes on her dancers. Blumenthal (1996) acknowledged this, as did Harris (1998) when she wrote extensively on the changes in dance aesthetics that she felt were due to the study of the Alexander Technique. She stated:

Similar to other dancer/choreographers' experiences and observations, I see the Alexander Technique work impacting modern dance aesthetics in terms of:

1. providing the dancer with informed knowledge of the body and how to approach various movement styles and techniques.
2. increasing awareness of the dancer/choreographer's habits and ego conditioning.
3. sharpening dancer/choreographers' clarity of intention and movement manifestation.
4. increasing choreographic range and movement choices. (p. 41)

Both dancers acknowledged that it seemed easier to apply Alexander concepts to ballet than to modern dance. Jacqueline stated that she felt this was due to the verticality and the 'rectitude' of the torso in ballet. Eva felt that it was easier due to the repetition prevalent in ballet classes. The traditional ballet class is a codified system of specific movements repeated in specific order, which, over the hundreds of years since its first appearance in the court of Louis XIV, has been kept by many institutions as a strong base for training dancers. In our last interview together, Lawrence stated that he was very pleased with the work that the dancers were doing. He said that he hadn't expected that the dancers would progress enough in such a short time that it would show up in their dancing, but he mentioned that, towards the end of the study, he had begun to explore a few dance movements with the dancers, including pli , relev , and port de bras, and that in these movements he could see a growing ability to sustain Alexander directions. In his phenomenological study on integrating the Feldenkrais Method and contemporary dance training, Long (2002) reported that all participants (with the exception of two who were not taking ballet class during the study) noted having an easier time applying the principles of the Feldenkrais Method to ballet and yoga than to contemporary dance. In discussing his findings, he stated that, "Data from students' interviews and journal entries suggest there was transfer from the context of the somatics and dance technique classes into the different contexts of ballet and yoga" (p. 125). He theorized that "Perhaps these new sensations became more prominent as students engaged in a form of movement that was almost habitually familiar. In the ballet class, the instances

of somatic transfer seemed to help students apply their new sensory experience to a familiar context” (p. 126).

3.6 Acknowledgement of differences between dance pedagogy and Alexander pedagogy

Some authors (Fortin, 1992, 1998; Green, 1999) have written on the subject of differences in the manner of teaching, and, inevitably, of learning, between dance and somatic methods. Increasingly, dancers and dance teachers who have studied somatic methods are influencing the typical modes of dance pedagogy. Furthermore, somatic practitioners in academic environments have been undertaking studies on the application of somatic methods to the training of dancers. Fortin (1996) wrote on what she called “the pedagogical challenge of somatic education” (p.24). She pointed out: “The first revolution is that technique classes in dance are traditionally centered around the professor, whereas somatic education is clearly centered on the student.”¹⁶(p. 24). She explained further that, from a somatic perspective, knowledge is constructed within the experience of each individual, which calls for them to take charge of their learning, “*prise en charge de leur apprentissage*” (p. 24). Long (2002), in the aforementioned study on integrating the Feldenkrais Method and contemporary dance training, made the following statement on the subject of student centered and teacher centered approaches to learning: “In balancing the relationship between a teacher and a student centered pedagogy, I learned that students value a combination of somatic self authority and teacher centered approaches to learning, and within this there lies a notion that each can inform the other” (p. 128). This concept of *prise en charge de l'apprentissage* is not new to the actual current in education, in which the acquisition of *compétences* relating to the “how”, prevails over the acquisition knowledge by memorization only. Many authors have written extensively on the subject (Bruneau, 1995; Lasnier, 2000; Perrenoud, 1995, 1999; Tardif, 1999). According to Bruneau (1995), “Training based on the acquisition of

¹⁶ “Un premier bouleversement provient du fait que les classes techniques de danse sont traditionnellement centrées sur le professeur alors que l'éducation somatique est clairement centrée sur l'étudiant”

competencies requires that one recalls the concept of responsibility”¹⁷ (p. 17). She explains further that:

The integrative character of a competence invites a change of attitude regarding learning and teaching. The student goes from a learning position that is passive to one that is active. The teacher’s function changes from animator and observer to that of partner, accompanist. From an approach based on teaching, we evolve toward an approach oriented toward apprenticeship.¹⁸ (p. 17)

The current reality is that the dominant method still used in most dance training is learning through imitation. Bluethenthal (1996) wrote: “It is very easy to become dependant on guidance from the outside. We rely on the teacher and the mirror to determine success, correctness and degree of progress” (p. 46). Eva commented on this subject in our third interview:

We do a great deal in dance through imitation, whether it is in class or in rehearsal, we are always watching somebody do something and trying to imitate it. Often in teachers or choreographers who have been inspiring for me, I see how their bodies are organized, and I think “Oh, O.K., that could be useful”, or that I could connect with that way of moving. I don’t think it is always necessarily a problem, but it does tend to impose an exterior image. But I think, especially at the stage where I am now in my dancing, it is not about assimilating from the outside, it’s more what do I want to express.

Referring to her dance training, Eva said:

I ran into most problems when I was young – you can’t really explain the whole process to kids, you just want to get them moving – but somehow, I think that carried on too long in my case. I was not really understanding the basics, I was doing ballet without really understanding what’s turnout and what are the basic ideas of ballet. I was sort of getting my body into the shapes of it without knowing how, and it felt sort of like a lottery, that those students, who could somehow naturally figure it out, did really well, but if you hadn’t gotten onto that path right away, there weren’t many tools to sort it out. Later, in my modern training, I think it kind of went to the other extreme, there was a lot of attention to detail, and a lot of attention to how things were done, but I didn’t for a long time feel like it made a whole for me, that it was something I could depend on.

¹⁷ “Une formation basée sur l’acquisition de compétences nécessite que l’on fasse appel au concept de responsabilité.”

¹⁸ “Le caractère intégrateur d’une compétence invite à un changement d’attitude à l’égard de l’apprentissage et de l’enseignement. L’élève passe d’une position passive à une position active d’apprenant ou d’apprenante. L’enseignant ou l’enseignante passe d’une fonction d’animation et d’observation à celle de partenaire, d’accompagnateur ou d’accompagnatrice. D’une approche axée sur l’enseignement, on évolue vers une approche orientée vers l’apprentissage.”

Jacqueline made two observations about aspects of dance training with which she was in disagreement. The first was: “I am in complete disagreement with certain ways of teaching dance which force the structure of the body – certain ways of teaching turn-out, for example” (App. E, #21). Her second area of contention (although she stressed that she had not experienced this in her own training) was: “I also disagree with a very authoritarian approach to teaching dance. I don’t think that hammering and denigration favor learning” (App. E, #22).

Jacqueline and Eva’s statements echo Perrenoud’s (1998) reflections on the subject of training teachers: “Training must prepare one to regard the self with a little sociology, a little psychoanalysis, and, above all must give one a professional status, clear and positive. Without narcissism, self-devaluation, but attempting to understand from whence comes our relationship to others”¹⁹ (p. 11).

Both Eva and Jacqueline acknowledged the difference in strategy in the teaching of dance as compared with the Alexander Technique. Of course the one-on-one approach to teaching that is used in the Alexander Technique allows for attention to detail that would be almost impossible in a group dance class, and leads to more personalized teaching, which, of course, allows for the second major difference, that is, the quality of the hands-on work. Jacqueline stated that “What is also very important is touch, which we don’t always find in a dance class. I find that the touch is rarely as helpful as the touch of Lawrence, for example” (App. E, #23). She also mentioned the fact that the dance teacher is often concerned with the execution of the image of the movement instead of the dancer’s possibilities within that movement. “It takes great sensibility on the part of the dance teacher to accompany the student in the exploration of his possibilities through movement” (App. E, #24). Again, reference is made to the value of an approach that accompanies the student throughout the learning process and respects the abilities and capabilities of the individual.

¹⁹ “La formation doit armer le regard sur soi d’un peu de sociologie, d’un peu de psychanalyse, et surtout lui donner un statut professionnel, clair et positif. Ni narcissisme, ni autodévaluation, mais essai de comprendre d’où viennent nos rapports à autrui.”

In our final interview, when I asked her to describe the differences and similarities she saw between the teaching methods used in the Alexander Technique and those applied in dance teaching, Jacqueline replied that she mostly saw differences, which, she felt, could become complementary. Both teaching methods dealt with what she called: “The body and its relation to space: internal and external” (App. E, #25). In her journal, she created the following chart to express the different view points:

<u>Alexander</u>	<u>Dance</u>
Globality	Details
Attention to the initiation of movement	Attention to the final image and to the form of the movement
Non-doing and allowing	Effects and dynamics (depending on the style of dance)
Minimum effort	Use of and at times glorification of effort (depending on the style of dance) (App. E, #25)

In an interview, Eva responded to my questions about the differences in pedagogy that she noted between the Alexander Technique and dance teaching:

It seems that the Alexander Technique is much more verbal feedback, directions – a mixture of hands guiding and words explaining – guiding, asking, rather than showing. [...] One thing that has really struck me is the simplicity of it, I think that is the most different from the other techniques I have studied – dance classes or Pilates, or whatever – I am used to focusing on lots of things at once, or trying to do fairly complex things, even if it’s with a single goal, even to reinforce the abdominals, say, but we do all sorts of different things... In the Alexander Technique, the focus is branching out in lots of directions, but the activity we’re doing is very simple, taking our time, repeating, and going over the same thing. The focus on changing rather than adding new things is different. There is a simplicity in the Alexander classes, or at least the way Lawrence teaches, I haven’t studied with other teachers, that seems to allow space for change, to empty out old patterns and to bring in new ones, rather than adding new ideas on top of old ones.

I followed up by asking her if this was how she saw dance teaching, as adding something on to what she already had, and she responded with examples that showed a change in her focus and perception:

Yeah.... For me, you see, a dance class is very complex. We're doing, we're concentrating on our alignment, we're moving in space, we are learning steps, we are working on rotation, and feet pointing, and arms and shoulders, etcetera, and I think that that many layered approach is very valuable, if for nothing else, it's good for training the brain to be quick. But I think that, ideally, if a new idea emerges that seems better than an old idea, it would be nice to think of first dropping the old one. In reality, we don't take time to stop and *un-do* something – we'll add in a new idea, and sometimes it will push the other one out. Even without 'undoing' an old movement pattern there is sometimes not space for it when a new movement pattern is learned. For example, a slight adjustment to the position of the pelvis could mean that the old position is abandoned, as the pelvis can't be in two places at once. However, I think that when a position is corrected we don't often bother or even know that we can let go of the old and now unnecessary tension that we held in the less efficient position. Alexander Technique encourages a conscious release of old tensions as old habits are set aside.

The following is the resume of an experience that I recorded in the journal that I keep to follow pedagogical and personal realizations regarding my teaching. Last year, for a period of three weeks, I was called upon to replace an injured teacher and to teach a somatics class to first year university students. At the time, I was also teaching ballet to the same group of students. I was acutely aware of how differently I presented material in the different courses. In the somatics class, I sensed the students' surprise when I asked them to experiment by themselves with a sequence of movement that wasn't at all clear to them. In ballet class, I am usually very precise in my teaching, giving quite specific directions regarding placement, execution and movement qualities. I remember vividly the expressions on my students' faces when, in the somatics class, I told them that I wasn't looking for the right position – I wanted them to explore the movement, to consider its relation to both inner and outer space. They were perplexed, and kept asking for demonstrations of placement and movement. I opted to show them, using students to demonstrate, the many options possible within the guidelines that I had laid out for them. I explained to them that teaching somatics was a different mode of teaching. My main interest was for them to experiment and to develop awareness that would inform them and could guide them to further experiment in their dance class, or in other situations. But the class was not about results in the same sense as is a ballet class. The experience made me aware of how little I allowed exploration within the context of the ballet class. Could there be room within the context of a ballet class for exploration and awareness of the multiple choices of movement interpretation? Although I often make use of students to demonstrate certain aspects of movement, I could explore other possibilities, such as having

them observe each other in dance class to analyze what strategies the demonstrator utilizes, or could utilize, to improve dance performance. I could also ask them to write and speak of their experience, which would have the combined benefits of helping them to consider the meaning of their experience, while informing me, as the teacher, as well.

3.7 Experience applying the technique in non-dance activities

Both dancers mentioned in their journals and in interviews the use of the Alexander Technique in daily, non-dance activities. This section has particular importance to me as a researcher, because it reveals the growing self-awareness of the dancers that allowed them to make changes in everyday activities, which they might not otherwise have looked into. I don't think that most dance training encourages and helps dancers to consider their use of themselves outside of dance, but this is exactly what is needed to change the basic postural organization that underlies all movement, and which can impede progress in the dance studio.

In our last interview, Jacqueline spoke of this: "I am able more and more to use awareness of lengthening in very simple daily activities, such as walking and sitting. [...] I have a good sense of directions when I walk, when I open out in space" (App. E, #26). She recalled being in a discothèque, following the end of the study period, when her back suddenly began hurting. She stopped dancing, sat on a stool and was able to use the Alexander work to direct herself out of pain and discomfort.

Right in the middle of the discotheque, I sat on a little stool and I began giving directions, sitting on my little stool. I think that it took maybe 10, 15 minutes, then the pain in my back was gone. There was no major change, but I had found a tool that allowed me to act on my discomfort and prevent it from settling in. I was very happy, even if I might have looked a little bizarre, immobile and upright, surrounded by jiggling bodies. (App. E, #27)

Eva wrote about the activity of cycling after the Alexander sessions. First, she described how she had become more sensitized to her misuse when cycling, and that she needed to adopt a different approach to the activity: "Getting on my bicycle afterwards I find that I am less tolerant of bumps in the road. My spine doesn't want to be jogged about when I am in that

released and open state. I end up riding on my feet rather than on my bottom.” She returned to the subject of bicycling toward the end of the study, writing in her last journal entry: “Bicycling, which is usually the first activity that I do after a session, is becoming a different experience. I find myself lengthening out of the handle bars rather than sinking into them. My torso feels very light and my shoulders free of tension. In this state I feel very open to the world.” And in our last interview, she stated: “It seems that when I feel my torso reaching up on a long diagonal, beyond where it really ends, it takes the weight off my arms and out of my shoulder joints, as if my torso can carry itself even in that bent forward position.”

Jacqueline commented that, although she had often had difficulty sleeping during a heavy rehearsal period, the evening Alexander sessions seemed to help her to regain a sense of calm and neutrality, which, she reported, helped her to sleep:

During sessions at the end of the day, after a day of work, I notice that I have more difficulty letting go of excessive effort in my legs. I do too much. But after a little while, I sense anew the same pleasant harmonizing of all of my body in spite of tensions. This has happened 2 or 3 times now, during the evening sessions, I leave energized. This lasts for about an hour, then, I feel myself slipping into somnolence. I sleep well through the night. I really have the impression that the evening sessions following a long day of work permit me to re-center myself. Because usually, in the process of creation, my tense body and my mind, agitated by the creative process and by the work dynamic, gives me several sleepless nights. This time, although I was troubled, anxious, at times, I was able to set it aside and abandon myself to sleep. The practice of the Alexander Technique seems more effective than the relaxation I usually use in these cases. (App. E, #28)

Jacqueline makes an important point here, when she compares the effects of relaxation with those of the Alexander Technique. I think that often, when people think of relaxing, they tend to collapse, to drop even important supportive muscle tone. But good, continued postural muscle tone is essential to the efficient functioning of the structure. For example, proper tone in neck muscles allows a good relationship between the head and the extensor muscles of the spine, which in turn support the ribs in an optimal condition to interact with the diaphragm for good respiratory function. In fact, good functioning of all of the gas, fluid and solid exchange systems in the body depend on continued tension within the muscular system for optimal functioning. What we are looking for in the Alexander Technique is not

relaxation, but good, appropriate tension, tension that is balanced and allows the easy interaction of all of our parts within the adaptable whole, in relation to the external forces around us, and to the environment with which we interact.

Here, I would like to reiterate a point made by many authors – among them Eddy (2000), Green (1999, 2000), and Johnson (1995) – that the individual is a reflection of its culture and environment. A subject history is inscribed in the soma, in the individual's unique manner of responding to the world, and in his way of regarding and analyzing himself. To me, the fact that the dancers in this study were able to make changes in their everyday activities is important, because it indicates profound change, at the level of their daily interaction with world and with others. According to many authors, socio-cultural forces act directly on the soma (Green, 2000; Johnson, 1995 and Varela, 1996). The somatic practices address indirectly this aspect of imprint on the soma. One of the reasons that somatic practices take time to integrate is because they question our constructed selves. Although this subject is not specifically dealt with in the study, it is evident in the results, especially in the changes that dancers note in their every day activities, and how these changes are described in their journals. I will close this section with a quotation from Louppe (1997) on the subject:

One sees that the perception of, or better, the poetic reading of danced movement, returns us to the reading of all movement. Like a mobilization of the self. Like the expression of a desire to work in the world, which itself, even if it passes unnoticed, none-the-less is not missing from the great palimpsest book of human intentions. Dance is nothing but the stage on which this inestimable and immemorial accumulation becomes visible.²⁰ (p. 124, 125)

²⁰ “On voit que la perception, mieux, la lecture poétique du mouvement dansé, renvoie à la lecture de tout mouvement. Comme mobilisation de l'être. Comme expression d'un désir au travail dans le monde, qui même s'il est passé inaperçue, n'en a pas moins marqué le grand livre palimpseste des intensions humaines. La danse n'est jamais que la scène qui donne visibilité à cet inestimable et immémorial dépôt.”

3.8 Change of perception

I am closing this chapter with the subject of change of perception, which I now realize could itself serve as the subject of an interesting study. As I look back at the first draft of my analysis of data, I see that I had identified it and entitled it as it is.

In both dancers' journals, I noted a slow evolution in the type of data reported, as well as in the terminology used. For example, early on, Eva reported information primarily related to body parts. After her first session, she wrote: "The standing posture is different than what I have worked on before, with the head forward and the back, including the hips, back. I usually work to bring my hips forward, so we'll see what this brings." Later, she shifts to information revealing a modification in her thinking and the emergence of a sense of globality. For example, she wrote: "I think that I am beginning to understand the directions (feet/heels/knees/back/head/) necessary for this movement. Like a giant zig-zag through the body." From the 15th session on, she began to use terminology with which she referred to herself holistically, terms such as: "mind/body", "self", and "my self", relating elements of internal sensation and at the same time of openness to the world. In our final interview, she stated, "To let the body find its own clarity and to guide it away from unnecessary effort seems to me to be the innovation of the Alexander Technique."

A similar evolution can be observed in Jacqueline's journal. In her early entries, she wrote about "a sensation of length and width" and a "vague sensation of depth". She separated the sensations, and wrote of them only in relation to specific parts of her body. For example, after the fourth session, she wrote: "I like to be guided in the sitting and standing work. New! Try to be available for the change of level from the top of the head, the neck and the knees. Letting the knees fold goes generally well, but I forget the sense of lengthening, of direction of the head" (App. E, #29). From her 12th session, she began relating these concepts to the whole, and began writing and speaking in more global terms, with less differentiation of the parts. After her 13th session, she wrote: "The more the session goes on, the more I understand the moving outward. Pleasant sensation of globality" (App. E, #30).

As I mentioned earlier, when I collected the journals for the first time in mid-study, I noted that the dancers described the Alexander Technique session in terms of what they felt happening in their bodies. In the interview which followed, two weeks later, I asked them to describe what was happening in the sessions to solicit comments elucidating their thinking, their sensations, and their self-direction. Their observations revealed a change in perception that gradually occurred over the course of the study. As a researcher, I was also relating to my own sensation by experiencing again, through their words, the difficulty and richness of this kind of process, and by allowing meaning to emerge from it.

When I first began reading the journals written by the participants in this study, I was struck by the language used to convey experience in the Alexander Technique sessions as well as that used to describe dance experience. When I was nearly finished with what I considered to be the last draft of this paper, I discovered an author, Wright (2000) who wrote on the language used in somatic learning situations and physical education. In her paper, she explains what she was researching by saying, “My purpose is to demonstrate how different understandings of the body and the self produce different pedagogical practices at the level of language and how, in turn, the use of language in these movement classes itself constitutes different bodies/different selves” (p. 35). This triggered my curiosity, and makes me want to look further at the meaning of language used in the fields of dance and somatics. Obviously, writing this thesis left me with many inspiring tangents to investigate.

CONCLUSION

In designing and realizing this study, my intention was to recall the experience of two professional contemporary dancers studying the Alexander Technique and applying its principles to their dancing. It was my intention, as well, to relate the experience of the teaching practitioner. To fulfill this task, I elected to conduct a qualitative study which Patton (1990) mentions as being most suitable when one is looking at experience. I chose, therefore, to use participant journals and semi-structured interviews as methods for the collection of data. The data was analyzed through cross-case inductive analysis.

All participants reported that they found the quartet interview very important. The practitioner stated that this session informed him on the level of understanding that the participant dancers had achieved, and he felt that it would have been helpful earlier or more often during the study period. He also stated that listening to the dancers' experience led him to elaborate on certain aspects of the technique that he had not sufficiently covered in the private sessions. In the design of future study, I intend to include similar informal sessions.

At the study's conclusion, there were some anticipated as well as unanticipated results, which I will briefly summarize. Due to the relatively short duration of the study, 10 weeks, I anticipated minimal integration of Alexander Technique material to dance. At the end of the study, both dancers acknowledged that there was no major noticeable change in their dancing as regards the rehearsing and performing of new material. The dancers had difficulty using the principles of the Alexander Technique during rehearsal, except when, as one of the dancers mentioned, she had time within the rehearsal period to experiment by herself at the side of the studio. Only then did she consciously experience some level of integration. The other dancer, Eva, pointed out "I think I am going to feel it in six months in my dancing" because she felt that it had to happen first in her everyday activities.

The study demonstrated that, even when psycho-physical change was not solidly, consciously integrated into dance rehearsal and performance, there was the possibility of transfer of principles and strategies from the Alexander Technique to other areas, specifically, to dance training, for example. These changes involved recognition of the value of process and the acknowledgement of different responses, awarenesses or directions which were described by the participant dancers using the principles inherent in the Alexander Technique. Both dancers experienced some applicability of the Alexander Technique to their training. Eva experienced it clearly in a contemporary class that wasn't geared towards results, but in which the process was valued. Jacqueline, who trained by herself, reported that it was easier to apply the technique in ballet-type movements or in movements that could be done slowly.

The changes reported were substantial in areas that were unanticipated – for example, in choreography, in activities other than dance, and in the utilization of strategies that demonstrated a change in thought and in perception. The changes in choreography were of two kinds. The first was purely aesthetic – Eva found herself more visually aware of tension in the movements of dancers on whom she was choreographing. The second had to do with kinaesthetic awareness – Eva reported that she felt the tension that she saw in the bodies of others, and that this heightened awareness sometimes led her to alter choreography.

The participant dancers acknowledged change and integration of the Alexander Technique in activities other than dance, for example in cycling and in writing for Eva, and in walking, sitting, standing for Jacqueline. Jacqueline remarked on the disappearance of her chronic headaches since the beginning of the study period, and revealed how, when the warning signs that usually signalled the onset of migraine began, she was able to use the Alexander Technique principles to get herself out of trouble. She also recalled successfully applying the principles of the technique when her back was beginning to tighten up while she was dancing in a discotheque. The disappearance of chronic discomfort as a result of improved use, although it is not necessarily the primary objective for the client, is not surprising, especially when one considers that Alexander developed his method while in search of relief from chronic vocal problems. Indeed, it is the case that most of the somatic pioneers, including

Feldenkrais, Sweigard and Gerda Alexander, evolved their techniques in response to the failure of mainstream healing modalities to address their individual health problems.

The data also revealed changes in the dancers' perception of how things should look and feel, as well as a change in the language they used to describe what was happening within them. As I mentioned earlier, the descriptions of the experience of the participant dancers went from descriptions of what they were experiencing in their body parts to descriptions of what they were sensing and experiencing globally. The use of the verb "allowing", in place of verbs like "placing" or "doing", began appearing in the journals of both dancers toward the middle of the study.

Finally, all of the participants noted how the keeping of a journal assisted them in organizing their thoughts on the work, and that this, in turn, aided them in expressing themselves in the interviews. Lawrence mentioned that being obliged to keep a journal led him to clarify his thinking concerning certain concepts, and that this had helped him in framing explanations that he used in his teaching. Speaking with the dancers a few months after the completion of the study, I realized how valuable it would have been to collect more data following the end of the training portion of the study, perhaps three to six months later, to see how the process of integrating the Alexander Technique to dance had proceeded with the participants. In future study, I will certainly consider follow-up interviews. Considering the relatively short duration of the study and the scope of the task of describing the experience of the dancer participants and of the participant practitioner, the results were substantial and informative for dancers and for teachers of both dance and somatics (in this case the Alexander Technique).

Conducting this study led me to question my own teaching of both somatics and dance technique, especially as it made me aware of how my pedagogical strategies differ from one discipline to the other, as well as how my work in one discipline could inform my work in the other. I am left with two important realizations from this study. The first, which I anticipated, is that it takes time (more than 10 weeks, at any rate) and that it is difficult to integrate somatic work into one's dancing – I am curious to find out if there is any way to

facilitate and accelerate the process. The second is that the traditional method of education in dance allows for mostly one-way communication. This is often the case in somatics, too. Through this study I've seen how potentially valuable the students' expression of their experience could be in the learning process. Knowledge of their experience could inform teachers and influence how they relate to the individuals who compose a dance class. Students' self-reflection would encourage them to become more autonomous.

There is probably no simple formula that can be universally applied to integrate somatic education in dance, perhaps because of the complexity of our socially and culturally constructed selves. This study hasn't answered all of my questions concerning the application of the Alexander Technique to dance, but the results point toward two recommendations for introduction of the Alexander Technique to dance training.

One of the dancers mentioned before the study commenced that the presumption among some dancers about somatic work is that it gets you too much in your head so that you analyse everything, and it winds up limiting what you do. Perhaps the complexity of contemporary dance, which the dancers in this study described as taking all of their attention, made the addition of new awareness difficult. Although I was not teaching the dancers in this study, I have heard similar statements from dancers I've worked with in the past about the difficulty of applying the Alexander Technique to dance. They can't think about it; it takes too much brain activity; they fear that paying too much attention to their organisation and to the movement will impede their performance. Certainly one of the tasks of the dancer is to keep multiple elements simultaneously within a broad awareness. So, how can the concept of layered thinking be explored in dance training in order to develop a level of awareness that is not limited to one or two elements at a time? Both dancers noted in this study that they could apply the technique to simple movement – at the ballet barre, for example. So perhaps the first recommendation would be continued work on the basics, even when working at a very advanced level, so that some of the training hours are spent on the elements of corporeal organization that are used to support danced movement.

The acknowledgement from both dancer participants of the difficulty of applying the principles of the Alexander Technique to complex movement also suggests a need for addressing the subject of thought in movement at an earlier stage in training, while movement is still quite simple. So the second recommendation would be that the Alexander Technique process of self-awareness and self direction could be introduced early in dance education, when fairly simple movements are being learned, and it could then gradually be used to support more complex movement, rather than itself becoming a complex element to be added on later.

Finally, this study made me aware of the similarities in philosophy between the constructivist current in education and that which underlies most somatic practice. These similarities lie within the shared conception of the importance of self-awareness, self appraisal and openness to the environment. In future research, I would like to examine self-reflection in the acts of teaching and learning, and, from the perspectives of both student and teacher, how this could affect the dancer's health and performance.

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORMS

FORMULAIRE DE CONSENTEMENT (praticien participant)

Nom de la chercheure : Fernande Girard

Nom de la directrice : Sylvie Fortin, PhD.

Institution, Département : Université du Québec à Montréal
 Département de danse

Date du réalisation du projet : 15 avril au 10 juin 2003

Dans le cadre de mon mémoire de maîtrise à l'UQAM, je (Fernande Girard) fais une étude intitulée *Les apports d'une approche somatique sur l'entraînement et la performance du danseur contemporain au niveau professionnel*. Madame Sylvie Fortin, PhD., professeure à l'UQAM, agit à titre de directrice.

Cette recherche a pour objectif de faire le lien entre la danse et la pratique somatique. La nature de cette recherche est de type qualitatif, c'est-à-dire que mon intérêt se porte particulièrement sur l'expérience vécue à la fois par des danseurs engagés dans un processus d'apprentissage de la technique Alexander, et par le praticien enseignant cette technique. Je cherche à décrire les perceptions des danseurs de leur apprentissage de la technique Alexander en lien à leur pratique artistique.

Le praticien, Lawrence Smith, accepte de donner une période de formation en technique Alexander d'une durée de 10 semaines aux trois danseurs participants, à raison de 2 séances par semaine pour chaque danseur. Il ne demandera et ne recevra aucune rémunération pour ce travail. Il a aussi la responsabilité de tenir un journal décrivant son expérience d'enseignement de la technique Alexander aux danseurs. Il accepte de faire une entrée d'au moins un paragraphe dans mon journal, et ce le plus tôt possible après chaque séance avec le danseur. En cas de besoin, la chercheuse fournira un guide de rédaction de journal. Les journaux seront recueillis à la 5^e et à la 10^e semaine de l'étude pour permettre à la chercheure d'en prendre connaissance avant la 2^e et la 3^e entrevue. Cela permettra à la chercheure de mieux cibler ses questions dans le but de décrire l'expérience vécue par tous les participants.

Le praticien accepte de participer à 3 entrevues semi structurées. La première entrevue, au début du projet, sera de type autobiographique. Il s'agit donc d'une entrevue où il sera amené à parler de son histoire. Dans une deuxième étape, à la 6^e semaine, suite à la lecture des journaux, la chercheure ciblera ses questions afin de mieux comprendre l'expérience vécue par le praticien. Ce même procédé sera adopté pour la 3^e entrevue à la fin de la 10^e semaine du projet. Ces entrevues seront enregistrées sur ruban, transcrites, et remises au praticien pour être corroborées par ce dernier avant d'être utilisées par la chercheure. Les entrevues conduites par la chercheure se feront dans la langue du praticien, et seront d'une durée de 75 à 90 minutes chacune. Les entrevues se teindront dans un endroit choisi par le praticien et selon la disponibilité de son horaire. Lors des entrevues, le praticien n'est pas tenu de répondre à toutes les questions. Les journaux et les entrevues ne seront utilisés que pour les fins de la recherche.

Les séances en technique Alexander avec les danseurs auront lieu au bureau de travail du praticien, situé au 5126, avenue Delorimier, Montréal. Les séances seront fixées par le praticien selon sa

disponibilité et celle des danseurs. La durée de chacune des séances varie de 50 à 60 minutes maximum.

Tous les participants à ce projet ne devront déboursier aucun frais et ne recevront aucun paiement pour le temps consacré à la réalisation de cette recherche. En fin de projet, une copie du mémoire sera offerte à tous les participants à l'étude. Le praticien accepte que son nom soit divulgué dans la rédaction du mémoire. Cette étude respectera le guide de déontologie de l'UQAM. Le praticien aura la possibilité de quitter le projet si, en cours de formation, certaines difficultés venaient à entraver sa santé, son bien-être et le respect de chacun.

Dans le cas d'un désistement, le praticien devra prévenir la chercheuse dans les plus brefs délais en la rencontrant ou en lui téléphonant au (514) 495-3513. Pour toutes plaintes concernant la conduite de cette étude, vous pouvez vous adresser à la directrice de recherche, Madame Sylvie Fortin au (514) 987-3000, poste 3499.

Vous conserverez une des 2 copies du formulaire de consentement.

Chercheuse _____ date _____

Praticien participant _____ date _____

FORMULAIRE DE CONSENTEMENT (danseur participant)

Nom de la chercheure : Fernande Girard

Nom de la directrice : Sylvie Fortin, PhD.

Institution, Département : Université du Québec à Montréal
Département de danse

Date de réalisation du projet : 15 avril au 20 juin 2003

Dans le cadre de mon mémoire de maîtrise à l'UQAM, je (Fernande Girard) fais une étude intitulée *Les apports d'une approche somatique sur l'entraînement et la performance du danseur contemporain au niveau professionnel*. Madame Sylvie Fortin, PhD., professeure à l'UQAM, agit à titre de directrice.

Cette recherche a pour objectif de faire le lien entre la danse et la pratique somatique. La nature de cette recherche est de type qualitatif, c'est-à-dire que mon intérêt se porte particulièrement sur l'expérience vécue à la fois par des danseurs engagés dans un processus d'apprentissage de la technique Alexander, et par le praticien enseignant cette technique. Je cherche à décrire les perceptions des danseurs de leur apprentissage de la technique Alexander en lien à leur pratique artistique.

En consentant de faire partie de cette étude, vous acceptez de participer à une période de formation en technique Alexander d'une durée de 10 semaines, à raison de 2 séances par semaine et ce sans aucun frais. Vous avez la responsabilité de tenir un journal décrivant vos expériences de formation dans cette technique, les mécanismes de transferts (somatique/danse) ainsi que toute autre information concernant les changements survenus dans votre pratique artistique. Vous devrez faire une entrée d'au moins un paragraphe dans votre journal et ce, le plus tôt possible après chaque séance en technique Alexander. En cas de besoin, la chercheure fournira un guide de rédaction de journal aux participants. Les journaux seront recueillis à la 5^e et à la 10^e semaine de l'étude pour permettre à la chercheure d'en prendre connaissance avant la 2^e et la 3^e entrevue.

Vous devez aussi participer individuellement à 3 entrevues semi structurées d'une durée de 75 à 90 minutes chacune. La première entrevue, au début du projet, sera de type autobiographique. Il s'agit donc d'entrevues où vous serez amené à parler de votre histoire. Dans une deuxième entrevue à la 6^e semaine, suite à la lecture des journaux, la chercheure ciblera ses questions afin de mieux comprendre l'expérience vécue par les participants. Ce même processus sera adopté pour la 3^e entrevue située à la fin de la 10^e semaine du projet. Ces entrevues seront enregistrées sur ruban transcrites et remises à tous les participants afin d'être corroborées par ces derniers, c'est-à-dire, que vous pourrez changer ou enlever des passages de l'entrevue et corriger les erreurs de transcription s'il y a lieu. Les entrevues menées par la chercheure, dans la langue des participants, se tiendront dans un endroit choisi par les participants et selon leur disponibilité. Lors des entrevues, les participants ne sont pas tenus de répondre à toutes les questions.

Le praticien en technique Alexander sera M. Lawrence Smith. Il est membre de la Canadian Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique (CANSTAT), ainsi que du Regroupement pour l'éducation somatique (RES). Les séances auront lieu au bureau de travail du praticien, situé au 5126, avenue

Delorimier, Montréal. Les séances seront fixées par le praticien selon la disponibilité des danseurs et du praticien. La durée de chacune des séances varie de 50 à 60 minutes maximum.

Les participants auront la possibilité de quitter le projet en tout temps, si en cours de la formation, certaines difficultés venaient à entraver leur santé, leur bien-être et le respect de chacun. Les participants à ce projet ne déboursent aucun frais et ne recevront aucun paiement pour le temps consacré à la réalisation de cette recherche. En fin de projet, une copie du mémoire sera offerte à tous les participants de l'étude. Les journaux et les entrevues ne seront utilisés que pour les fins de la recherche. Cette étude se fera dans la confidentialité, et respectera le guide de déontologie de l'UQAM.

Dans le cas d'un désistement, le participant devra prévenir la chercheuse dans les plus brefs délais en la rencontrant ou en lui téléphonant au (514) 495-3513 (ou pour tous renseignements additionnels concernant cette recherche). Pour toutes plaintes concernant la conduite de cette étude, vous pouvez vous adresser à la directrice de recherche, Madame Sylvie Fortin au (514) 987-3000, poste 3499.

Vous conserverez une des 2 copies du formulaire de consentement.

Chercheuse _____ date _____

Danseur participant _____ date _____

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF INVITATION

19 mars 2003

Kathy Casey
Montréal Danse
Directrice artistique
372, Sainte-Catherine Ouest, bureau 109
Montréal, QC, H3B 1A2

Madame Casey,

Mon nom est Fernande Girard. Je suis actuellement en période de rédaction de mémoire pour l'obtention d'un diplôme de maîtrise à l'UQAM. Par la présente, je viens vous faire part d'un projet de recherche que j'aimerais réaliser avec quelques danseurs de votre compagnie. J'ai eu la possibilité d'apprécier la qualité professionnelle ainsi que la versatilité de vos danseurs lors du dernier FIND ainsi que lors de votre représentation au Parc Lafontaine durant l'été 2002. J'ai beaucoup aimé le travail de vos danseurs, et c'est pourquoi j'ai décidé de choisir votre compagnie.

Cette recherche a pour objectif de faire le lien entre la danse et la pratique somatique. La nature de cette recherche est de type qualificatif. Mon intérêt se porte particulièrement sur l'expérience vécue à la fois par les danseurs participants et par le praticien en Technique Alexander pendant cette étude en m'attardant particulièrement aux mécanismes de transfert de compréhension qui s'opèrent dans les deux directions. Je cherche à comprendre comment l'apprentissage de la technique Alexander peut modifier, selon sa perspective, la performance du danseur professionnel et quelle est au cours de cet apprentissage l'expérience du praticien.

La technique Alexander a pris beaucoup d'essor dans les 10 dernières années, elle est enseignée à la Julliard School, New York University, North Carolina School of the Arts, L'École National de Théâtre à Montréal et périodiquement à l'UQAM.

Ce projet permettra à quelques danseurs intéressés et sélectionnés de recevoir sans frais des séances en technique Alexander avec M. Lawrence Smith, praticien de 14 ans d'expérience en enseignement de cette technique.

Sur une période de 12 semaines, les danseurs recevront 24 séances d'une durée de 50 à 60 minutes chacune. Les danseurs intéressés devront tenir un journal décrivant leur expérience d'étude de la technique Alexander et participer à 3 entrevues, selon leurs disponibilités. Je puis vous assurer que ce projet de recherche n'entrera pas en conflit avec l'horaire de travail de vos danseurs. Cette étude sera menée en toute confidentialité et selon le guide de déontologie de l'UQAM.

Si vous êtes en accord avec ce projet de recherche, j'aimerais avoir la possibilité de rencontrer vos danseurs pour en faire la présentation, car j'aimerais amorcer ce projet en début d'avril. D'après vous, quelles seraient les modalités pour présenter ce projet aux danseurs de votre compagnie?

N'hésitez pas à me téléphoner, si vous avez des questions concernant ce projet de recherche.

En espérant avoir le plaisir de vous rencontrer.

Sincèrement,

Fernande Girard
(514) 495-3513
5126, av. Delorimier
Montréal, QC H2H 2C2
Email : fgirard@videotron.ca

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEWS

Interview #2

Date_____

Name_____

- Describe your experience in an Alexander Technique session?
- How do you feel after the sessions?
- What are the concepts or principles you have learned in the sessions?
- What would you say is your most important realization relating the A.T. to dance? Can you describe it in more detail?
- For the last five weeks, you have been studying the Alexander Technique; can you describe in detail what you have been experiencing since the beginning of your study?
- What was your experience of applying the Alexander Technique in your dancing?
- Can you relate specific examples of movements or activities in which you applied the technique?
- How has the Alexander Technique affected your dancing?
- How has the Alexander Technique affected you?

APPENDIX D

DESCRIPTION OF A TYPICAL ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE SESSION

Description of a typical Alexander Technique session.

There are a number of approaches used in teaching the Alexander Technique. The approach used here resembles that developed and used by F.M. Alexander.

Chair work.

The bulk of the work will be done using sitting, standing and walking as activities within which the technique is applied. The most prevalent procedures used are known as chair work. There are different ways to approach this. The teacher may ask a new student to sit and stand a couple times so that he may observe the student's preparatory patterns, which he may point out (in a simplified way) to the student. Generally, I feel that it is better not to demonstrate to the student what he is doing poorly, as the student may then be too intent on trying to correct this. The teacher will then, with the student seated or standing, begin to give the student hands-on and verbal guidance, that is, he will attempt to guide the student into a less contracted, more balanced state, beginning with the upper neck and continuing along the spine and out the limbs. He will explain the theory behind the technique, and will begin to teach the verbal directions that outline the actual directions that the student will learn to create within himself. While continuing to indicate this new condition to the student, the teacher will then guide him through simple movement, often, the action of sitting and standing. With the teacher's guidance, the student will be able to accomplish the actions of sitting and standing while continuing the directions to sustain the new improved use. He will then begin to take the next step, which is sustaining improved use of himself while initiating movement for himself. In this way, he will learn a way of directing himself in activity that may then be applied to any action.

Why the chair?

Looked at simply, sitting and standing is flexing and extending the joints of the hips and legs to raise and lower the body in space. It is part of the basic movement of going from squatting

to standing. It relies on the interaction of a number of reflexes that in combination serve to balance and extend the body against the force of gravity. The full extension of the spine can be guided and maintained throughout the movement by the teacher, as there is no horizontal displacement or complex arm or leg movement that would require a change in intention during the course of the movement. Extending to move upwards, or allowing the joints to hinge to move downwards, can easily be initiated by the teacher, freeing the student from making the decision to move. It is in this decision to move that the student locks himself in to an habitual mode of movement. If the student decides not to move, but makes himself available to be moved, it becomes possible to build movement on better global organization of the musculature.

Many of the primary maladaptive patterns that are acquired have to do with control of balance. From basic reflexive balance we acquire pre-emptive patterns that often include excessive fixing of muscles. Most movement will then elicit these patterns as the global structure on which secondary movements are placed. So we must deal directly with these basic patterns before going any further.

It is true, of course, that many bad habits are acquired in relation to the use of the hands. But a habit for movement of an arm (or any part) is elicited along with the total pattern, so that it is nearly impossible to effectively change a partial pattern without altering the global pattern. Also, as the arms are supported on the torso, it is sound procedure to establish the torso-leg anti-gravity system before approaching, indirectly, the use of the arms.

Table Work

A part of the lesson often consists of table work. If the student is injured, the lesson may begin here. The student lies on his back on a firm table, with his head supported so that its relationship to the back is similar to that maintained in standing. His knees are bent, so that the soles of the feet are flat on the table, shoulder width (or slightly more) apart. Many of the holding patterns which have to do with maintaining balance and verticality will not be present in the supine body, which will make the task of balancing postural tone somewhat simpler. The practitioner will use his hands to guide the student into a more expanded state

while soliciting the student's participation in actively sending lengthening messages to his musculature. If a muscle is contracted, it is the person who is contracting it, so it is the person who must learn to do something else to inhibit excessive contraction – nothing takes place in a completely passive state.

The purpose of the table work is primarily to help the student release habitual patterns, so that he may then become more aware of what he does to create them. It is also very helpful in working on students who are injured or otherwise have difficulty standing. It may be dispensed with in some cases, but most find it a helpful adjunct to chair work.

Application work.

Most find that, once they have done sufficient chair work, they have acquired the tools for applying the work to other activities on their own. Nevertheless, a teacher can be very helpful if he works with the student on specific activities, such as playing a musical instrument, or running, for example. But it is useless to jump to quickly to this stage, for, if the student cannot even sit and stand without interfering with basic reflexes, he will certainly not be able to confront a more complex and perhaps more psychologically stimulating activity. After all, the goal of Alexander work is not doing a specific activity better – this can be accomplished by simple practice. The goal is to change underlying habits that may cause injury or in some way limit performance.

Theory

Students will be taught the basic principles of the Alexander Technique, including primary control, inhibition and direction. To this end, they will be given articles to read explaining different aspects of the technique. The same material will be given to each participant dancer.

APPENDIX E

JACQUELINE : CITATIONS IN FRENCH

1. J'ai des lignes très claires. J'ai un bon sens de l'espace. J'ai travaillé très fort à développer des jeux dynamiques entre la fluidité et des traits staccatos, compacts et incisifs. Je pense que c'est une force. Ce n'était pas une force naturelle, mais c'est une habileté que j'ai développée. Oui, très consciemment. J'ai aussi un bon sens du rebond dans les sauts, mais je me rends compte que j'ai perdu de la force, dans les chevilles, les impacts dans le bas de mon dos me limitent maintenant dans mes sauts.

2. Il y a quinze ans, lorsque j'ai fait de la technique Alexander pour, la première fois, je n'avais pas réussi à faire ce lien. Ton projet de recherche m'offre l'opportunité de re-essayer. J'y trouve aussi un cadre propice (avec la rédaction du journal, les entrevues) à ce genre de réflexion.

3. J'aime beaucoup la façon dynamique qu'a Lawrence d'enseigner la technique Alexander. De mon expérience, d'il y a quinze ans, j'ai gardé un assez bon sens des directions mais j'ai aussi le souvenir de m'être vécue dans un corps fragile et plat comme une feuille de papier. Je ne me voyais pas faire de grands efforts. Or, ce n'est pas le cas avec Lawrence. Il apporte des exemples de son vécu. Il fait de la rénovation, il se penche, il fait du jardinage, il fait de la course, toujours en continuant à penser à ces principes. Donc, par différents exemples il fait que effort et dégageant peuvent d'être compatibles. Ça me fait du bien de voir que ça peut être dynamique et très actif, je le vois dans certaines démonstrations de Lawrence. Avec l'enseignement de Lawrence, je perçois la technique Alexander plus active et plus dynamique que ce que j'avais compris auparavant.

4. Durant « être agie » (debout-m'asseoir) à vitesses variables et parfois avec des arrêts pour déjouer et renouveler l'initiation du changement de niveau, j'ai ressenti une plénitude et une circulation à la verticale à travers tout mon corps à laquelle s'est ajoutée une opposition entre bas du dos et genoux devant. Pendant quelques minutes, je ressens très clairement l'initiation et la direction par la tête (en haut et devant). Il en découle un allègement du travail des jambes et un étalement des pieds. Mes articulations cheville, genoux, hanches, nuque (à la base du crâne) me font l'effet de charnières mobile, huilées, souples. Wow!

5. Durant la séance je me sens calme et bien. Je trouve ça étonnant d'être en même temps à l'écoute de ce qui se passe en moi, et en même temps de répondre aux indications tactiles et verbales de Lawrence. Et il y a des fois, juste par une parole ou par l'action combinée d'une parole et d'un geste, je sens comme un « dé clic » dans mon corps ou tout à coup un circuit, comme un courant d'énergie qui passe. Donc, je me sens calme mais vraiment très alerte aussi. Avec toutes sortes de petites sensations qui se passent: ça va, ça vient.

6. Ce 'peu d'effort' est déroutant. La notion d'effort représente pour moi un repère dans le mouvement. L'effort ancre musculairement la sensation de mouvement.

7. Une attention ouverte au corps. Garder en tête et rendre le corps disponible à l'ouverture, l'expansion, l'allongement. Cultiver une attention ouverte au corps afin de dissoudre les blocages ou les cristallisations dans le mouvement. C'est un travail titanesque à partir de principes tout simples.

8. Cela me fait réaliser qu'il y a un certain temps que j'ai ressenti le « poing » dans le dos, le signe de fatigue et de surmenage que je ressens parfois. De même que je n'ai pas eu de « mal de tête » causé par la très forte tension du côté droit du cou. J'éprouve généralement ce malaise aux trois semaines, à mon réveil. Cela peut mettre jusqu'à 48 heures à se dissiper. Ce mal de tête qui frise la migraine ne m'est arrivé qu'une seule fois depuis le début de cette étude. Même si je me cultive pas toujours une posture 'idéale' du cou, les sessions elles-mêmes et les moments de conscientisation de cette zone en-dehors des sessions semblent apporter un certain dégage ment.

9. Au cours des dix semaines de sessions de technique Alexander ça m'est arrivé une fois. J'en ai parlé à Lawrence. Au cours de la session ça a diminué, et, cette fois là ça a duré moins de 48 heures. Depuis, je n'ai plus eu. Ça fait au moins cinq semaines que je n'ai plus eu ce mal de cou. C'est un net progrès.

10. Je me suis aperçue que je ressentais un meilleur dégagement quand je pensais plutôt à l'allongement, quand je procédais plutôt par l'allongement de la tête

11. J'aime me fier à la sensation. Mais dans la nouveauté j'aime aussi être confortée dans cette sensation par le professeur, la répétitrice, le chorégraphe et en l'occurrence par Lawrence en session Alexander. Je parle à Lawrence de sensation (c'est une référence, un repère, un ancrage de l'apprentissage). Il rectifie en parlant plutôt de direction. L'idée de direction ne me réfère pas à la sensation mais à une attention constamment renouvelée. La sensation ferait référence au passé, à la mémoire alors que l'intention de direction est constamment renouvelée, alimentée, ajustée au fil des mouvements, changement de niveaux et déplacements. Ne fixe rien, n'adhère à rien. Permettre, ouvrir. Inhiber le réflexe, l'habitude par la pensée de direction. Entretenir une conscience ouverte, réceptive et agissante. Une circulation.

12. L'idée de direction s'accorde bien à ma façon d'être dans mon corps dansant, à ma façon de danser. Je me définis beaucoup dans ma danse par mon rapport à l'espace, par l'espace qui traverse mon corps et par les volumes que je sculpte dans l'espace. L'espace est souvent une motivation à mes déplacements, à mes changements de niveaux. C'est en profitant des directions différenciées, opposées ou composées que je crois pouvoir créer de l'amplitude dans mes mouvements et dans mes lignes.

13. Lawrence m'invite à voir où l'expansion peut m'amener. Ne pas avoir une idée préconçue de la « place » où je me rends. Cela me semble une clé importante de la technique Alexander. Et cela me rappelle une des premières conversations que j'avais eue avec Lawrence à propos de sensation et de la référence à la sensation. Lawrence me mettait en garde contre la recherche « d'une place confortable », de la recherche d'une sensation connue qui, éventuellement, pouvaient me préserver de la découverte de possibilités.

14. J'ai l'impression que le tout s'organise mieux et avec moins d'effort. Il y a de meilleures chances que le bassin se place en suspension au-dessus des jambes. Il semble que le fait de ne pas concentrer mon attention et mon effort sur la seule zone du bassin permet (au lieu de forcer) à ce dernier de se trouver aligné en tombant de son poids naturel. Ainsi je ne force pas un redressement de mon bassin mais je crée de l'espace vertical afin qu'il puisse trouver sa place au dessus des jambes tout en restant en circuit avec la colonne et la tête.

15. Dans d'autres séquences, plus verticales ou plus rapides, je suis encore trop préoccupée par la recherche de divers points d'initiation du mouvement comme l'épaule ou le genou ou la hanche, plus à me laisser traverser par les répercussions de cette initiation pour rester « branchée » au « primary control » tel que je le connais en session et dans les mouvements quotidiens.

16. J'opte volontairement pour une approche à petites doses afin de ne pas devenir obsessive ou complètement découragée. J'aborde le parallèle à faire entre Alexander et danse comme une exploitation qui laisse ainsi le champ aux possibles, à la découverte mais aussi aux tâtonnements et à l'absence de résultats.

17. Durant la répétition, c'est beaucoup plus difficile. C'est possible par moments [...] C'était possible de le faire quand je décortiquais les mouvements et que j'y allais à mon rythme à part. À partir du moment où j'ai pu aborder les nouvelles séquences, me conscientisant à certaines notions Alexander, notamment le primary control, à ce moment-là j'ai pu ressentir une différence dans le feu de l'action, dans la rapidité à la continuité. Mais à priori, ça me prenait du temps et plusieurs essais et erreurs dans le nouveau matériel pour repérer ces notions-là.

18. Je constate que je pense d'abord au "primary control", puis j'initie par les genoux vers l'extérieur dans la ligne de mon ouverture comme si j'étais "agie" comme une marionnette puis ma pensée se dirige vers la ligne postérieure de mes cuisses. Ces trois pensées agissent en accumulation c'est-à-dire que quand je suis rendue à penser l'arrière des cuisses, j'ai quand même toujours en tête, direction de la tête et direction des genoux. Cela vaut pour la

portion descendante du grand plié alors que pour la remontée, une action en conscience du « primary control » permet à mes jambes et à mon bassin de retrouver l'organisation en station debout et en ouverture en 1^{ière} ou à la seconde.

19. Dans le travail debout, je finis par sentir la charnière nuque-tête! Une globalité se dessine graduellement. Mais j'ai de la difficulté à lâcher prise dans les jambes. Je reconnais la petite poussée vers l'avant de mes vertèbres lombaires. Cette poussée 'réflexe' gêne et raidit mes psoas. Le sens de profondeur du bassin est plus difficile à alimenter lorsque je rétrécis l'espace à l'avant de mes hanches.

20. Le jour suivant, en répétition, je remarque que je reproduis cette « poussée » des lombaires dans des mouvements de rotation au torse en diverses situations : jambes pliées, jambes pliées et croisées, dans de larges 4^{ième} bassin surélevé et en appui sur un bras.

Je remarque aussi cette bascule-poussée dans les lombaires lors que je fais le tour suivant : tour en-dehors, en dégagé derrière sur jambe d'appui pliée auquel s'ajoute un mouvement/vif/ des deux bras à droite puis à gauche. L'élan des bras de côté à côté avec une jambe dernière fragilise l'allongement de ma région lombaire d'où la désagréable sensation de compression et de pincement. Je reprends ces mouvements, un à un, en recréant une dimension de profondeur dans le bassin (c'est-à-dire me conscientiser à la « toile de fond » de mon sacrum en opposition avec les genoux) et d'allongement par la tête. Difficile à réaliser à tout coup, mais sensation d'un dégagement partiel. C'est prometteur. Continuer cette approche.

21. Je sens toutefois peindre une manière différente d'être dans mon corps.

22. Je suis clairement en désaccord avec certaines façons d'enseigner la danse qui forcent la structure du corps, certaines façons d'enseigner l'en dehors, par exemple. Je ne suis pas non plus d'accord dans la formation en danse avec une approche très autoritaire, je ne pense pas qu'être martelé et dénigré favorise l'apprentissage.

23. Le toucher est aussi très important, ce qu'on ne retrouve pas toujours dans une classe de danse. Je trouve que le toucher est rarement aussi aidant que le toucher de Lawrence, par exemple.

24. Ça prend une très grande sensibilité de la part du professeur de danse d'accompagner à l'étudiant d'aller dans sa possibilité à lui, à travers le mouvement.

25. Le corps et son rapport à l'espace : interne et externe.

<u>Alexander</u>	<u>Danse</u>
Globalité	Détails
Souci de l'initiation du mouvement	Conscience de l'image finale de la forme et du mouvement
Laisser-faire et avenir	Production d'effets, de dynamiques (selon le style de danse)
Minimum d'effort	Déploiement parfois glorifications de l'effort (selon le style de danse)
Mouvements simples, directs, organiques	Mouvements complexes, aisés, mais pas nécessairement organiques. (selon le style de danse)

26. Je parviens de plus en plus à alimenter la conscience d'allongement dans des activités quotidiennes très simples comme marcher et être assise. [...] Je sens bien les directions quand je marche, quand je me déploie dans l'espace.

27. En pleine discothèque je suis allée m'installer sur un petit tabouret et j'ai fait mes directions assise sur mon petit tabouret. Je pense que ça a pris des dix, quinze minutes puis mon mal de dos est parti. Il ne s'agit pas d'un changement majeur mais j'avais là un outil pour intervenir sur mon malaise et faire en sorte que le mal de dos ne s'incrute pas. J'étais très contente même si j'avais l'air un peu bizarre immobile et droite au milieu des corps gigotants.

28. Au cours des sessions en fin de journée, après une journée de travail, je remarque que j'ai plus de difficulté à relâcher le travail excessif des jambes. J'en fais trop. Mais au bout d'un certain temps, je ressens à nouveau la même agréable harmonisation de tout mon corps malgré les courbatures. Cela se produit depuis deux, trois fois maintenant lors des sessions en soirée, je ressors énergisée. Cela dure environ une heure, puis je me sens graduellement sombrer dans une somnolence. Je dors bien la nuit. J'ai vraiment l'impression que les sessions en soirée après une grosse journée de travail me permettent de me recentrer. Car habituellement en processus de création, mon corps courbaturé et mon esprit en ébullition par la création et la dynamique de travail, me donnent quelques nuits blanches. Cette fois-ci, j'ai été soucieuse, peinée, parfois, mais j'ai pu en faire abstraction pour m'abandonner au sommeil. La pratique de la technique Alexander semble plus efficace que la relaxation que je fais dans de tels cas.

29. J'aime « être agie » dans les « debout » « assise ». Nouveau. Essayer d'être prête au changement de niveau par le sommet de la tête, la nuque et les genoux. Lâcher les genoux se passe en général assez bien mais j'oublie le sens d'allongement, de direction de la tête.

30. Plus la session avance, plus je comprends l'élargissement en rayonnement. Agréable sensation de globalité.

31. Mon corps est comme un 'patchwork' de zones de courbatures.

APPENDIX F

SUGGESTED GUIDE FOR THE COMPOSITION OF THE
PARTICIPANT DANCER'S JOURNAL

SUGGESTED GUIDE FOR THE COMPOSITION OF THE
PARTICIPANT DANCERS' JOURNALS

Note how you feel:

1. before the session.
2. during the session.
3. after the session.
4. in you dancing.

Note your state before the session,. e.g., available. receptive.

Describe how the experience of this session relates to what you have experienced in the past.

Note what was particular to this session (if anything).

Note how what the practitioner said in the session corresponds to or differs from what you were experiencing.

Describe your experience of integrating what you worked on in the session into your dancing.

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