

ABSTRACT

A somatic approach to contemporary dance technique advocates individual uniqueness and the distinctive sensory experience of each student as a starting point to improve understanding and self-knowledge of movement. Despite the recent increase of somatic education within dance education and academia, there has been little research investigating somatic education and contemporary dance from the perspective of the student.

This thesis presents a phenomenological study examining student perceptions of the Feldenkrais Method® of somatic education and contemporary dance technique with a group of pre-professional and professional dancers in New Zealand. A socio-constructivist position informs the researcher's teaching process and the interpretation of students' experiences. Students' voices are examined through thematic analysis while the researcher's teaching practice is investigated through teacher research (Cochran-Smith, 1993; Mitchell, 2000; Russell & Bullock, 1999) and reflective practice (Schon, 1983).

Students' perceptions of experiences over five days of classes are gathered through participant observation, group discussions, journal entries and individual interviews. Results are discussed in relation to socio-constructivist epistemology, students' perceptions of self-authority and sensory awareness in dance.

The study has shown that a combination of both teacher and student centred pedagogy was a useful approach for integrating somatic education and contemporary dance technique. The outcomes of this study may contribute to knowledge in a range of areas that include research methodology in dance, research in the Feldenkrais Method® of somatic education and research in teachers' professional knowledge in dance education.