

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the ways in which the Feldenkrais Method is perceived to influence motor learning, motor control, and creativity in certain college and university dance programs located in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States. The study reviews literature concerning the Feldenkrais Method and its relationships to theories of motor learning, motor control, and creativity. Data were processed utilizing the epistemological stance of interactionism and grounded theory methodology. Data collection included on-site semi-structured interviews of key personnel, both instructors and their students, observations of studio and/or classroom lessons, and document review.

This study provides primary stage research on the perceived influence of the Feldenkrais Method on motor learning, motor control, and creativity in dance practice. Beliefs exist in the field of somatics that the Feldenkrais Method develops and improves internal matters and learning processes. This study documents and supports certain of these beliefs, offering new insight into how dance is perceived to be influenced. Among these influences, patterns and issues were identified and differentiated. These include effects such as improved internal sensitivity, ability to attend to sensations and perceive internal information, and developed self-awareness. Further effects include influence on anatomical learning, particularly in regard to learning about human and personal anatomy, understanding interaction amongst body parts, and improved movement efficiency. Additionally, identified patterns of influence suggests a method of learning, using processes of exploration, investigation, and experimentation, that is developed and improved in order to achieve these effects.

The study identifies the need for more effective ways to transfer Feldenkrais philosophies and experiences to a greater number of aspects of dance training, particularly in dance technique. An issue concerning an internal/external split of perceived Feldenkrais influence was identified in this research. It is crucial for the identified patterns of influence to exist in certain externally oriented situations, and, therefore, this must be recognized and more closely addressed. Although transfer of Feldenkrais needs to be addressed in both dance technique as well as dance choreography, it was identified that there is less of an issue with transfer to dance choreography, as this is an area where there is often more opportunity to address internal matters and new learning processes.

This study contributes to the scholarly work of Feldenkrais specifically, as well as to somatics more generally. A critical analysis and subsequent new theory is presented as to what is occurring during the inclusion of Feldenkrais somatic practices in dance, and why dancers are being influenced in certain ways. This study contributes an analysis of somatic work that occurs in dance, and, it offers a framework for understanding how and why this form of somatic work affects dancers. The study also provides critical analyses of how the Feldenkrais Method is being used, and can be used, to enhance performance and to achieve optimal performance in dance practice. New knowledge and new theory provided by this study can assist in the development of the integration of somatic education and dance practice, and encourage practitioners from both fields to more effectively assist their students in making the transfer of Feldenkrais experiences and information easier and more likely to occur. Information from this study can likely serve as a foundation for future studies concerning Feldenkrais somatic practice in relation to dance. It is likely that knowledge and theory from this study may be applied to teaching and learning other somatic performance activities.