



## The Embodied Teen: A Somatic Curriculum for Teaching Body-Mind Awareness, Kinesthetic Intelligence, and Social and Emotional Skills

Susan Bauer, North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, CA, \$24.95

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The reviewers are both dance educators and board certified dance/movement therapists and believe in the importance of somatic learning and its significant role in the schools. Both have had teaching, counseling and dance/movement therapy roles with adolescents and have experienced the power of the body-mind connection in helping adolescents navigate the physical, social, emotional and relational developmental challenges during this time.

Over the past 15 years, America's educational system has been primarily dedicated to cognitive functioning and testing, which contributes to the mind-body split and reinforces teens being out of touch with their bodies. Along with society's fascination with technology and social media, youth development has not been prioritized. With *The Embodied Teen* student-centered and embodied anatomy approach, students can be empowered by interactive somatic experiences. Subsequently they can hone their awareness of themselves in movement, strengthen their mind-body connections and learn how to promote healthier well-being and reinforce resiliency.

Due to adolescents' hormonal and physical changes, the application of the somatic education curriculum would increase self-discovery, self-esteem, self-awareness, and social interaction for teens. The curriculum supports positive youth development with a student-centered approach of being responsive, reflective and providing meaningful opportunities to learn and form connections. Bauer's somatic comprehensive curriculum has a theoretical and philosophical basis that is informed by three established paradigms that are integrated to create this framework: social-emotional learning (SEL), kinesthetic intelligence and

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body awareness. The social-emotional learning and self-awareness paradigms of Bauer's theoretical framework, rooted in SEL programs inspired by Daniel Goleman's books *Emotional Intelligence* (1995), and *Social Intelligence* (2006), help students develop self-awareness and self-regulation of feelings, and positive prosocial skills. Kinesthetic intelligence is one of the learning styles described by Howard Gardner (1993), whose theory acknowledged the significance of the body and movement in education. Kinesthetic learners use their bodies for learning and understanding. However, Bauer's curriculum utilizes kinesthetic intelligence activities to provide interesting learning opportunities to enhance increased body awareness, self-awareness and social interaction. The social-emotional learning paradigm links to the National Education Standards of physical education, dance, science, health, and wellness. Therefore, the curriculum is cross-curricular which helps provide sense and meaning to learning for students. When students see the connections between varied subject areas, the learning becomes more relevant and meaningful. This curriculum encourages experiential and personal exploration with students making discoveries along the way while at the same time being involved in assessing their own progress. Students flow into dialogue with their internal and external experiences giving them increased knowledge and self-awareness. A primary goal is a change of consciousness toward self-care. The vehicle is movement, which, along with the cognitive study of anatomy, gives students practical knowledge of their own moving bodies with the educator as a director and an observer.

Bauer brings a strong embodied movement background (Body-Mind Centering, Ideokinesis, Authentic Movement, Contact Improvisation, Bartenieff Fundamentals), its philosophical foundations and 30 years of teaching experience in creating this curriculum.

For ease of comprehension and organization, this book has a straightforward structure in which three main sections are distinguished: the rationale for somatic movement education for adolescence (Part I), fundamental pedagogical principles for the application of the curriculum (Part II), and the application of the somatic education curriculum/activities (Part III and IV).

In Part I the rationale for Somatic Movement Education (SME) for adolescence discusses the theoretical framework that refers to learning through experiential body-base movement activities with a student-centered approach.

Part II describes the key pedagogical principles for the application of the curriculum:

(1) facilitating somatic experience that is inclusive of objective information and subjective experience, (2) supporting a student-driven curriculum, (3) balancing of inner sensing and active movement, (4) teaching about unconscious perception of movement and spatial orientation, (5) utilizing a scaffolding approach, (6) creating a safe space and a sense of community, (7) allowing time for integration of the movement experience, (8) and teaching from embodied language. In addition, the pedagogical principles provide a comprehensive outlook on learning to teach the somatic curriculum, which includes the educator's qualifications, teaching-learning arrangements methods, organization of students' learning, productive relationships and communication techniques, and preparation for sensitive topics, such as touch,

sexuality, and trauma. Therefore, the facilitator would be better equipped to respond to the possible presenting challenges.

Parts III and IV describes the somatic movement education curriculum/activities, considered by the author to be “the heart of the book.” This section contains a series of ready-planned somatic education movement activities that are clearly explained, and easy to follow with the ability to address cross-curricular connections. The curriculum features 50 activities that integrate somatic movement practices, kinesthetic intelligence, and social-emotional learning to support adolescent development. The organization of activities include anatomical information on each topic, broken down into specific steps: purpose stated, time needed, clearly sequenced activities and experientials. Photos help to visually demonstrate the embodied activities and explorations. Discussion ideas as well as a highlighted section on tips for leaders are included at the end of each topic. Each activity offers easy strategies for helping students focus their attention, improve their self-regulation skills, build resilience to stress and develop a positive mindset in both school and life.

Also included in Part III is a section on the importance of the cultural body. Bauer, through her anthropological studies and teaching in Thailand and Taiwan, discusses the significance of using an inclusive cultural lens. More explicit sociocultural examples would be helpful here.

The curriculum can be utilized by skilled professionals (movement practitioners, teachers, coaches, therapists, and counselors) who work with youth. Although this curriculum does not have a dance/movement therapy focus, the activities are transferable and adaptable. Dance/movement therapists use a variety of techniques and dance forms in sessions that were presented in *The Embodied Teen*. Bauer’s somatic curriculum presents four approaches that can be linked to dance/movement therapy, which are: (1) body awareness, (2) structured movement interventions, (3) movement explorations, and (4) touch all perceived through an awareness of culture. Like Bauer, the dance/movement therapy theoretical framework is interrelated to self-awareness on a body level. The dance/movement therapist utilizes structured movement interventions to create a safe environment for the client to become aware of their bodies, sensations, and feelings. Structured movement helps clients to expand their movement repertoire. As a result, the client expands their emotional range and their ability to develop positive and adaptive life skills. For a dance/movement therapist, movement explorations are developed by acknowledging the client’s presented themes/challenges articulated in their movement and verbalizations, whereas, Bauer’s movement explorations involve the guided movement/discussion approach. Often appropriate touch is used to support the therapeutic process. As dance/movement therapists, we must educate our clients on the use of touch in therapy and obtain permission from the client. Bauer has devoted an entire chapter in Part II that clearly outlines the guidelines for “intentional touch” to assist the facilitator in proactively using touch. There is also a very engaging comprehensive chapter on the “breathing basics” (Part IV) that speaks about the anatomy of breathing, preceptions of breathing, breathing and sound, movement and feeling, extending to breathing in our earth body and breath of life.

The interface between somatic education and dance/movement therapy is apparent in that both guide adolescents in their body and movement awareness and

expression of thoughts and feelings through the experiential and movement-based activities. The focus on developing social and emotional skills by working in groups and establishing relational connections and supportive communities strengthens a sense of empathy among the group members. During this period in adolescent development, their connection and social action engagement can grow out of their mutual connections and relationships. Students' social activism often has roots in the authenticity of their individual and collective movement experiences.

The reviewers teach in DMT graduate programs and agree that this book could be used for supervision purposes. Exercises regarding the breath, relaxation, mindful movement and embodied anatomy experientials are topics DMT students are exploring and will find this material helpful and a valuable resource providing movement activity ideas that could be utilized for the development of their dance/movement therapy internship and practice.

Finally, we would like to share our belief that dance/movement therapy be integrated into the schools. Dance/movement therapists have the somatic experience, developmental knowledge, observation skills and psychotherapeutic background to support children and adolescents to engage in both therapy and therapeutic learning supporting their health and well-being.

We thank the author for her book *The Embodied Teen* and believe the work supports the dance/movement therapy field in both its content and connection in developing intraprofessional collaborations among the American Dance Therapy Association and educators. We appreciate the opportunity to reinforce the necessity of somatic education as well as dance/movement therapy being a vital part of every student's movement learning experience in supporting the health and wellbeing of our youth.

## Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

**Ethics Statement** This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

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