

24 August 2014

Dear LUTSF Secretary,

I am writing to confirm the details of my recent trip to the Body-Mind Centering Conference in Saratoga Springs, NY and to enclose the report which describes my experience.

Conference information

Body-Mind Centering and the Moving Body
Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, New York, U.S.A.
27-29 June 2014 (plus two pre conference days 25 & 26 June)

Achievement of purpose

The main purpose of attending the conference was to inspire my future practice and teaching of Body-Mind Centering. I would say without hesitation that the conference was wholly inspiring and nourishing, and has already and will definitely help me in the future as I begin to offer this work more widely within my own dance community and other groups that I work with.

Highlights of the trip

A key experience was taking part in an environmental workshop on the last day of the conference. Being able to connect, through movement, with this unfamiliar place alongside people from around the USA and beyond was very humbling and expanding at the same time. Another highlight was being able to connect, at a personal level, with Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, who is the founder of the BMC work and continues to pioneer new research into the landscape, memory and resonance within the body and to make it accessible to those of us who are curious.

Suggestions for future awardees

I shared this time with people who had travelled from other countries and as incomers we all found it quite difficult at times to enter a community of people who knew each other well and who enjoyed reconnecting with each other. My suggestion would be to say that although travelling is very worthwhile it is also worth thinking about how, and making plans to ensure you have the resources to cope with being so far away from friends and family and home.

Plans to share information

In early August I was able to share specific workshop material in a collaborative creative context with a group of dancers I am currently working with (The Ripple Project). This was valuable for us as a group and I will continue to share the different experiences with individuals and groups in the coming months. There is also the possibility for continued dialogue and sharing with people and projects happening in the USA which I would like to pursue.

Thank you again for making this valuable experience possible for me and I wish you all at LUTSF every success in the continuation of your vision.

Yours warmly,

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Introduction

Body-Mind Centering and the Moving Body was the 29th annual conference hosted by Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York. The BMC Association (BMCA) organised the conference as a way to bring together everyone with an interest in BMC to share workshops, talks and performances in order to deepen the understanding and possibilities of the BMC work and to make connections with people to strengthen the sense of BMC community across the USA and the world.

The conference ran across a 3-day weekend with 2 extra pre-conference days presented by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen (founder of BMC) and Steve Clorfeine, an experienced teacher of original performance developed through improvisation.



Photo of Maren Waldman's environmental workshop, copied from BMCA Facebook page. I am on left, in yellow t-shirt.

Personal reflections:

BMC Principle: Support precedes movement

With the support of the LUTSF I was able to move towards a long held goal, that of attending a Body-Mind Centering (BMC) conference in the USA. My desire to do this stemmed from the idea that I had somehow missed out on experiencing any of my BMC training in the USA, where the work was first developed. Since the 1970s Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen has been exploring and researching the landscapes and functioning of our human body in relation to ourselves, others and our environment. Because the work was pioneered and taken up by many in the USA it means there is now a flourishing community of educators, practitioners and teachers who are exploring and using the work in many different contexts: within dance training, improvisation and performance, yoga

and other body mind modalities, a wide variety of therapeutic practice and professional collaborations within the wider health arena. The work is also flourishing in Europe and wider afield. But there was something about the culture and place in which it was developed that has always drawn me, something that might lead to a deepening of my own understanding of the work and of connecting to the wider community and possibilities for taking the work forward and using it to stimulate creative movement ideas.

This particular journey towards the conference was personal as well as professional. When the information about the conference dates dropped in last year, I found myself signing up without hesitation. There are so many wonderful opportunities in dance, dance science and education research (my areas of interest) but usually I mull them over, carefully deciding which would be the best use of time and whether possible with limited finance, but not this time. This time I simply committed to my intention and desire to go. My mother was 86 years old and in quite a serious stage of decline so when I saw the conference dates would fall on her birthday the following year, 25 June, I think some part of me knew she would not be around on that date. So I decided that it might be the right time to go; important to do something nourishing and brave and potentially transforming. Although there is a great comfort in knowing your parent survived to an old age, it is also hard to lose someone who has been there for every 52 years of your life. And that is what happened, by the time LUTSF confirmed my award, my mother had passed away.

It still feels quite soon to evaluate fully the professional and personal impact that the scholarship has had, but I am grateful to have a chance to reflect on how it has benefitted me and how I can take this into the future. Like all creative communal activity, there are difficulties and challenges to be navigated and unraveled. Stepping in to a community I didn't know was challenging but it gave me the chance to learn, to observe, to interact and to be inspired by all of that experience. I also had an accident on the second night of the conference, thrown backwards off a desk chair I was stepping onto, thinking it was a normal stable four legged desk chair when in fact it had rocker legs on the back side. By some miracle I didn't break anything but I damaged my hand and wrist and my whole left side so I ended up dealing with something I could not have envisaged.

Researching creativityⁱⁱ and exploring the body at a deep level has shown me that you require a deep trust, a safe environment, an open, curious attitude, an ability to focus and a willingness to embrace the unknown...

BMC Principle: This work is a process of going from unknowing to knowing to unknowing. To map the human body is to map the universe

This experience of being with those I didn't know, and dealing with my body and its unknown responses to this trauma meant that I was able to come to know the resources and capabilities within me, while each day making decisions and choices that felt healthy and interesting and fun! There is no doubt that I have a deepened trust and knowing of my own body which is invaluable to me as a dancer but also as someone who would like to offer support to other movers in their own journeys towards trusting, knowing, caring for and expressing with, their bodies, at all ages and stages of life and dance career.

Outcomes:

BMC Principle: When you touch someone, they touch you back equally. When you are touched by someone, you touch them back equally.

1. Establishing new friendships and relationships:

I have made meaningful connections with people from many different parts of the world, including Australia, Brazil, Greece, and the Czech Republic as well as in states across the USA. Individuals are using or being influenced by the BMC work in different artistic or academic settings, often collaborating with others in different fields of work. There are definite possibilities for developing these connections in the future and this is a very exciting prospect.

2. Gathering ideas to develop:

In July I was able to draw on and share the environmental workshop ideas of ⁱⁱⁱMaren Waldman to generate movement ideas for a new research and development period with four women dancers in their fifties – ^{iv}The Ripple project. I have been interested for some time in how performance work can happen outside of the black box and how it can be created and performed in an outdoors environment. I was very excited to be able to share Maren's ideas with others and to find real scope and inspiration to develop them in our own way and in response to our environment. In this case it was the beautiful beach at Yellow Craigs in East Lothian, Scotland.

3. Inspiration - passive and active:

Embodiment, it's not what you think!

Inspired by so many of the people I met and the projects or performances they shared; particularly my second opportunity to attend a workshop with Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen. As the founder of the BMC work Bonnie continues to travel the world sharing her embodiment and knowledge. At the same time she continues to explore the uncharted landscapes of the body including the earliest embryological structures. This work and its openness to how it might be used continues to inspire me and is particularly valuable at this time as I begin to structure my own practice and to demonstrate and articulate the value of the BMC approach.

Conclusion:

In conclusion I would say that this experience allowed me to embody many facets of creative exploration and adventure: taking steps into the unknown, pushing my boundaries and normal comfort zones, dealing with the unexpected and being open to new ways of working. It has resulted in greater confidence, clearer direction and more connection for me which is very much what I hoped would be the case. What I didn't know however were the ways in which those hopes and aims would unfold. The unexpected and delightful outcomes as detailed above will support and inspire me towards many new adventures in the years to come.

Future plans:

I plan to disseminate the information about LUTSF as widely as possible and to share my own positive experience of receiving the scholarship via social media, my website and in personal interactions with friends and colleagues.

ⁱ Basic BMC Concepts as defined by Alison Granucci in October 1989 (list of 15 concepts in total)

ⁱⁱ With Dr Kerry Chappell and Professor Anna Craft, Graduate School of Education, University of Exeter. Dance Partners for Creativity (www.education.exeter.ac.uk/dpc) and other projects. With Dr Sanna Nordin and Dr Kerry Chappell, Trinity Laban, : an investigation into how creativity is nurtured and facilitated in pre-vocational dancers <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14647893.2012.694415#.UnOA2FMSio0>

ⁱⁱⁱ Maren Waldman, University of Colorado, Boulder. Currently working on her first environmental dance film, Postcards to the Earth. <http://fingerlakespermaculture.org/?p=2700>

^{iv} The Ripple Project <http://www.ripplearts.co.uk/>



Photo of Debbie Watson taken by Susan Hay at Yellow Craig beach in East Lothian for The Ripple Effect