

Applying Principles

Word gets around.

It's come to my attention that some practitioners (after Wave 1) feel that something is missing from their understanding of Hanna Somatic Education that leaves them feeling a bit lost in their work.

The article in an earlier SomaTimes, *Somatics Didn't Work; Now What?* reveals something along the same lines, particularly where people revert to non-somatic (i.e., manipulative) techniques to address conditions they don't know how to deal with somatically. It's understandable, but a sounder response would be to explore somatically until a somatic solution was found – something Thomas Hanna specifically advocated in his Wave 1 lecture (7/18/90, side 2).

He also said, "I want you to be able to do everything that I do" (7/10/90, side 2, 28:20), and he usually got the desired outcomes in three to four sessions or fewer.

Part of the problem may lie in discriminating which kinds of conditions lend themselves to somatic education and which do not. Tom spoke exactly of that issue in some of his lectures, distinguishing functional conditions from lesions (structural conditions involving tissue damage). Sometimes, it isn't Sensory-Motor Amnesia.

Another part of the problem may have to do with how people are learning the work. Are they learning protocols "by rote" without understanding the processes and principles being used? Are they learning somatics with equal emphasis on internal sensation (1st person), feeling (vs. mental) connection with the person with whom they are working (2nd person) and objective analysis of posture, movement, and personal history (3rd person)? Or do they have basically an intellectual understanding of somatics and a mechanical facility with technique, but not an intuitive understanding of somatics and a felt facility with technique? Has their technique been crippled by an indoctrinated fear (during training) of hurting clients? (See my critique in, "Pandiculation 'Light'".)

Yet another part of the problem may have to do with principles of somatic education and how to apply them. We perceive principles both intellectually and intuitively and apply them by feel.

Where does that leave us?

First of all, since word gets around, it has come to my attention that people are doing certain things during lessons in ways different than those Tom taught us.

For example, Tom taught us to do the Startle Reflex lesson with the client's legs down flat. I know this for a certainty because, when I had my co-student-in-training/client do the shoulder lock-in (you all were taught to do that, weren't you?), I had him press down with the shoulder and also the diagonally opposite leg to increase the sense of lock-in (try it). Had knees been up, I would have had to instruct him to straighten his leg and then bend the knee, again, and that wasn't the case. I checked this with one of my cohorts, and after a moment of reflection, she confirmed my memory.

What's the difference? The Startle Reflex is a movement into flexion. Movement out of Startle Reflex is movement out of flexion. The Startle Reflex lesson is done with legs down (certain exceptions being possible to account for as-yet-unhandled discomforts).

Principle? End a maneuver in the position that corresponds to freedom from the habituation you are overcoming. Ponder that until your intuition understands.

Another example: The lock-in/quick reverse of the Trauma Reflex lesson. The Trauma Reflex lesson addresses habituated twisting. Trauma Reflex almost always involves a habituated twist that interferes with freedom to twist during walking, and thus, balance. The lock-in for the third maneuver (knees to chest, chin tucked, arm across) is *not* about the rectus abdominis (not involved in twisting), but about the obliques and their relation to the shoulder girdle (involved in twisting); in my view, the ending position isn't on ones back; the ending position is a position of sidelying twist, with the shoulder, arm and head turned and thrown to one side, pelvis and legs turned to the other side.

Principle? Same one: End a maneuver in the position of freedom from the habituation you are overcoming, which in this case is restriction of the ability to twist.

In the Wave 1 training, some people ended this maneuver in the twisted position, others on their back. I saw a faint smile on Tom's face, as he observed people practicing; I expect, had he lived through the next week, he would have addressed the difference between the way they did it and the way he showed it, with an explanation as to why he did it the way he did.

There are other differences between how I remember the original teaching, and how some people are doing sessions, now. In the past, as now, I have brought these departures to people's attention and suggested they test my version to see which way they like better (by results). The proof of the pudding is in the eating, not in my personal say-so, nor in anyone else's.

Guidance by principles empowers practitioners to apply the teaching in new, more effective ways.

Here's an example of complementary empowering principles: (1) "Whatever your client is doing 'wrong,' have him do it *more*, and then *less*." Notice how that's like pandiculation. If a person has a certain complicated Trauma Reflex pattern, have him exaggerate it, then come out of it, repeatedly. Observe the movements, understand the pattern. (2) "Know yourself." Duplicate your client's Trauma Reflex pattern in yourself to learn what's going on in him.

These principles give you a way to discern what's going on in a person (from a 3rd person and 1st person point of view) and how to deliver a customized lesson.

Lack of guidance by principles leaves people confined to rote ways of doing things, without the confidence or understanding to address situations not addressed by the basic protocols or to improve upon what they have been taught; it may lead to people feeling lost in details or just lost, particularly when they encounter a new situation.

Rote learning leads to an artificial division between official teaching authorities and practitioners, who might consider themselves "junior" and "never to be as good as." This artificial

division may discourage questioning of what is being taught – the opposite of Tom’s exhortation to us, his 1st wave students – “If something I say doesn’t sound right, I want you to question me!” (He said that at least twice.) Subtle discouragement of questioning leads to a dulling of discrimination and may lead to a stunting of the teaching (in scope and in spirit), to losses of aspects of technique, to loss of efficacy, to a lowering of expectations, to a diminishment of the overall functioning of the teaching in the world.

The principle, “Intensity of experience accelerates learning,” shows up in pandiculation and in the robust results of a skilled somatic educator. On the other hand, If a practitioner habitually resorts to “pandiculation light” because (s)he’s afraid of ‘hurting’ the person and doesn’t understand that (s)he’s teaching control through the range of motion and through the range of strength, (s)he’s likely to lack either skill in assisted pandiculation (as Tom taught it) or confidence in the virtually sure-fire efficacy of pandiculation because the results (s)he sees reflect that fearful way of operating.

The principle, “To know yourself is to understand another,” shows up in the assessment skills of the person who has developed a high degree of somatic awareness.

The principle, “Teaching is duplication,” shows up in the confidence of someone who has solved a certain somatic problem in themselves, understands it from within, and is now working with someone who has the same problem.

Principles empower in ways that rote learning cannot.

Somatic education is a “Socratic” teaching, in which questioning is central and learning comes from probing and exploring (with or without guidance from outside). But you need to have good questions to ask, questions whose answers make a difference to you, questions with “teeth.”

So let me say this. Principles can aim your attention in fruitful directions and help clarify your intentions. They sharpen your understanding so you can ask revealing questions, put the answers into practice, and adapt your practice to new situations. Principles can function as “training wheels” until your own direct perception and intuition take you beyond rote performance to creativity, and you are consistently effective in new territory. Then, you can come forward with your own discoveries.

If you are one of those who have felt “something is missing” from your understanding, that “something” may have been principles that make it all make sense – and the direct experience of principles functioning. So, listen to the Wave 1 recordings. Get inspired by Tom Hanna; partake more in his way of seeing. Choose a single principle from those recordings, or from those discerned by the Principles-to-Practices committee, and work with it until you see the advantage it gives you; then go after more principles and make them your own. Grow teeth and chew on this teaching. Ask your questions and don’t accept nebulosities for answers; persist until you get answers that satisfy you.

Or as Tom Hanna told us, “Never tolerate a mystery.”