

Dancing With Your Head On

Mental Imagery Techniques for Dancers

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A student once declared, “My biggest challenge is me.” In the class *Psychological Techniques for Dancers* we were discussing using mental imagery and other psychological skills that can be used effectively to enhance dance practice and performance. The insightful student put into words the fact that to realize our dreams we sometimes need to reflect on ourselves. This article will describe the benefits of including mental imagery and self-reflection skills within the context of dance training and performance. Specific psychological skills will be explained with supporting research focusing on the effects of mental imaging.

Creativity and expression in dance may be enhanced through the development of both body and mind. Practicing psychological skills, like imagery and relaxation, helps focus dancers inward where they have access to feelings about themselves and their dancing. The resulting self-awareness is an important and rewarding part of psychological skills training. Becoming more aware of actions and reactions frees people from automatic responses, and allows for more and better choices. Likewise, giving dancers more tools to reflect on their internal dance experience provides them with opportunities for improving technique

and fully exploring avenues for self-expression.

Creating a psychological approach, involving mental imagery and self-discovery, within the context of dance education, is a useful tool for improving performance. As a psychologist and psychoanalyst, I have learned about the ways in which individuals think, feel, learn, dream, and experience themselves and others. In psychological skills training, students learn and practice various skills, and participate in discussions regarding their dance experiences. My students, college dance majors and adolescents in intensive training programs in dance and figure skating, have shown a desire and a willingness to explore their dance experiences, practice mental imagery, and talk about their discoveries. As students develop skills, like visualizing and reflecting on themselves, they are freer to create new ways to express themselves through dancing. In this way, dancers cultivate the power of their imagination.

Psychological Skills Training

Dance students and dance professionals can use psychological skills training to fine tune technique, learn new movements, rehearse mentally, creatively explore self-expression, and overcome emotional distractions (like anxiety). Taught outside the dance class, students practice mental skills separately to increase confidence, focus, creativity, and self-awareness. In class, feedback from my students has been instructive, as we have talked about the process of applying psychological practices to dance. A college dance major wrote on a course evaluation, “I would recommend this course to fellow dancers because it focuses on the internal dancer. It makes you think

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differently about dance. This class also helped me with a lot of skills and structure I needed to work on. I'm more aware of what I'm doing wrong." Another student wrote, "It was very helpful for my mind and my body. My alignment improved and I feel as though I know myself and fellow dancers better."

Increasing self-awareness is an important and ongoing objective in psychological skills training. I will give a few examples of how this process of self-discovery aids dancers in their pursuit of self-expression and mastery. In the next two examples college dance majors participated in a 15-week semester course that met twice a week. In class, dancers participated in one or two 10 to 15 minute guided imagery sessions, and visualized themselves in various positions and performing movements. Sometimes alignment and technique would be the focus, other times creative qualities of movement. Class discussions included topics on goal setting, motivation, managing emotions, and self-confidence.

In the first example, early in the semester, a dance major approached me after class and described her frustration in not being able to form a clear mental image during our practices. She had wonderful technique and was a very expressive dancer. I explained that developing the ability to use mental imagery, like learning physical skills, takes time and practice, and suggested a simple mental exercise that she could practice at home. This exercise had the dance student select an object, look at it for a few minutes, close her eyes, and then attempt to recreate it in her mind's eye. Imaging techniques require the ability to form, maintain, and internally maneuver mental pictures. While not everyone has complete images, practicing forming images will increase the effectiveness of imagery on dance performance.

In class, this same student consistently worked to stay focused during the imagery exercises. She actively participated in class discussions and observed that she danced best when she was having a bad day. I asked her, "What makes it that you cannot dance your best when you are having a good day?" The question gave her pause for thought, and helped her to become more aware of how her emotional life affected her dancing. By the end of the semester, the student reported being able to effectively imagine dancing while listening to music, and used this mental technique to prepare for a performance at the end of the year. Her confidence had increased and she felt accomplished dancing as she chose to imagine herself through mental imaging practices.

In this next example a student in one of my classes spoke about not having the necessary motivation to develop her dancing. We had established a rapport and a degree of trust in the group that permitted open discussions. I was able to find questions that

helped her to explore her feelings in more detail. Through this emotional exploration, the student realized that some of her difficulty had to do with her mother's over-involvement with her dancing. As a result, the dance student struggled to locate an internal, personal sense of initiative, and considered quitting dance as a result of her conflict. Through the discussions and mental exercises in our classes, and her independent performance enhancement practices, she clarified what her dancing meant to her. In this way she freed herself to craft new ways to grow through her dancing and deepened her commitment to dance.

A third example illustrates work with a young teenaged competitive level figure skater. She had participated in an introductory psychological skills training program in the Spring and a more intensive Summer training program. Previous to this training she had missed qualifying to advance to the next competitive level for her age group despite her skating proficiency. Her coach had high hopes for this young skater and wanted her to gain the necessary self-confidence to compete successfully. The coach and consultant worked together to create a psychological skills performance enhancement program for the top-level skaters at the arena.

In class, the young skater actively concentrated during the guided imagery sessions. Participating openly when we discussed emotional distractions like anxiety and other people's reactions to her performance, she expressed feelings about non-skating peers and their reactions to her quest for excellence. She felt that they could not understand her wish to excel. Our discussions helped her resolve some of her own feelings, and alleviate internal conflicts about being the best skater that she could be.

As her next event approached, my student felt that she had the mental tools to succeed even though she had been overwhelmed by her lack of success at the previous trial. She did, in fact, advance a level. What pleased me more was that she enjoyed the event and felt an emerging sense of her own personal skating style. Her mother and coach also recognized that this hard working teenager now felt ownership of her special talent.

The Psychological Connection

Self-exploration and self-development in the context of dance training is consistent with the current philosophies of dance education. Dancing is a way to stimulate personal growth, self-expression, and learning. Through self-reflection young people have more opportunity to identify and articulate for themselves what is meaningful and worth striving for in their lives. Moving back and forth between nonverbal and verbal forms of ex-

pression allows dance students to unite important aspects of their own experience. Through this personal integration, a dancer strengthens his or her voice and solidifies a sense of self.

Whether dance is perused professionally or for personal enrichment, psychological methods provide easy to learn, safe, and effective ways to help fulfill a dancer's potential. Young people who aspire to dance professionally must invest an extensive amount of time in their training to achieve this goal. The singularity of purpose sometimes interferes with the development of other valuable skills. By incorporating a psychological orientation into professional dance training, educators may give students more ways to succeed with their dance and non-dance pursuits. Given that many professional dancers become teachers themselves, they can employ psychological methods in developing their teaching style.

The psychological methods that are discussed in this paper are part of a psycho-educational program. These methods are distinct from psychological treatments aimed at relieving emotional suffering. People experiencing emotional or psychological difficulties that affects not only their dancing, but relationships, and general well being, should seek out psychotherapy treatment. Psychological skills training is for those who desire mastery, creative self-expression, and greater freedom through dance.

The BRAVE Method: A Psycho-Educational Program

BRAVE is a mnemonic that I created to help dancers learn and remember basic skills – Breathing, Relaxing (or Releasing), Aligning, Visualizing, and Energizing. The BRAVE program includes a range of information derived from dance performance, dance education, clinical psychology, sports psychology, Ideokinesis, and the practice of meditation. The program is inspired by dancers and their desire to express themselves in movement and music. As hard working and highly creative individuals, dancers and dance students can greatly benefit from the latest advances in psycho-educational training. Psychological skills training accelerates the learning process, increases ease of movement, explores creative self expression, and helps reduce the risk of injury. As a result, dancers may dance safer, smarter, and longer.

Psychological skills training addresses issues like goal setting, maintaining personal motivation, coping with slumps and injury, keeping a journal, establishing a practice routine, building and maintaining self-esteem, working with emotions, performance anxiety, and regulating performance intensity. Each of these has importance to dancers, students, and dance educators, and interested readers may find additional information on these subjects.¹ The

BRAVE method strives to incorporate methods to improve all of the above concerns. For the sake of focus, this paper will concentrate on some applications of mental imaging and self-discovery in dance. Since the effects of mental imagery and self-discovery may be increased with breathing and relaxation techniques, these methods will be included briefly.

Breathing and Relaxing

Dancers may benefit from the practice of conscious breathing in several ways. Gentle rhythmic diaphragmatic breathing is used to soothe and soften the body and to quiet and focus the mind. In this way, breathing techniques can help minimize distractions. Dancers learn to self-monitor internal states of arousal by focusing on breathing, which can help them to cope with performance anxiety and to internally adjust levels of intensity during a performance.

Slow, even, long, and friendly (mnemonic: SELF) breathing promotes relaxation and mental clarity. There are a variety of breathing techniques from yoga traditions. A basic beginning exercise is placing both hands at the lower part of the rib cage feeling the movement of the diaphragm and the effects of breath in the body. Inhaling and exhaling through the nose with calming intentions, oxygen enters the body, and sequentially fills three parts of the lungs. As air enters the bottom portion of the lungs, the diaphragm stretches down and massages the contents of the abdominal region. The middle portion of the lungs are expanded by the rib cage widening and the sternum rising. The clavicles lift slightly as the upper portion of the lungs fill with air. The sequence reverses on the exhalation. A nicely paced breathing exercise is 4 count inhalation, gentle pause, 8 count exhalation, slightly longer pause, and repeat 4 to 8 times. Counting the breath with the rhythm of the beating heart is a wonderful way to deepen the experience of relaxation.

With practice, the individual feels more peaceful and receptive, sometimes entering an altered state of consciousness. This type of meditative state has similar qualities to peak performance experiences. During these rare moments, performers report “being in the zone.” Other descriptions of peak performances are: no fear of failure; absence of thinking during performance; total immersion in the activity; effortless performance; a sense of being outside of the body, like an observer; time-space disorientation, motion slows down or speeds up; perceived universe to be integrated and unified; involuntary experience; total freedom and joy.

Dancers who have taken my course and their teachers have commented to me that they see an increase in movement flow resulting from the prac-

tice of mental training. Fluid movement is pleasurable to the dancer as well as to the viewing audience. We can speculate that certain mental training methods may increase the frequency of the elusive and extraordinary flow states that occur during peak performances. Research in this area of dance may shed more light on this hypothesis.

A is for Alignment

Ideokinetic imagery was developed Dr. Lulu Sweigard, to improve skeletal alignment. She taught dancers at Juillard, and had an interest in finding patterns of change in posture using visualization practices. In her book, *Human Movement Potential: Its Ideokinetic Facilitation*, she explains her basic concept of Ideokinesis as an, "educational procedure by which human movement can be more fully developed so that it is not only effective but can be maintained through most of life without incurring the deliberating effects of premature wear and tear."² Following her educational approach, dancers practice visualizing mental images that represent optimal skeletal alignment based on anatomical principals.

Sweigard conducted research to find if her alignment technique using visualization exercises would re-coordinate muscle action enough to produce measurable changes in skeletal alignment. She identified changes in skeletal alignment in 200 subjects who had participated in her posture class for one semester (a 30-minute class taught over the course of 15 weeks). She also looked at statistical analysis of 497 subjects using x-rays showing deviations from symmetrical skeletal alignment. She found alignment changes in almost all subjects.

From these results Sweigard identified nine lines of movement, as areas of the skeleton, "whose location and alignment had the greatest influence on the alignment of the structure as a whole." Some examples of ideokinetic lines of movement imagery are: lengthening the spine downward; shortening the distance between the mid-front of the pelvis and the 12th thoracic vertebrae, and widening across the back of the pelvis.

An example of imagery for a line of movement lengthening down the spine is to imagine water flowing down the curves of the spine and dripping from the coccyx bone forming a puddle on the ground directly underneath the body. Typically, when first learning this technique dancers lie on the floor in the constructive rest position, legs bent at a 90 degree angle, arms at a 15 degree angle from the torso with palms facing up. Unlike standing, this position distributes the pull of gravity more evenly throughout the body allowing dancers to experience skeletal alignment with less tension and more ease. Con-

scious breathing adds relaxation and focus as dance students deeply sense subtle adjustments within their bodies aided by lines of movement imagery.

My introduction to this approach was at New York University with Andre Bernard. As an undergraduate, my classes included psychology, dance therapy, and dance. The dance department offered a series of courses in Ideokinesiology. The class objective was to increase kinesthetic awareness and understanding of the musculoskeletal system with the aid of visualization. Like a musician fine-tuning a very intricate musical instrument, dancers gain greater familiarity of their bodies' skeletal dynamics and related kinesthetic sensations.

Mental Imagery in Dance and Athletic Performance

Different types of imagery can be used in psychological skills training. The following section describes research concerning lines of movement and other imaging techniques that have been found to be effective.

Since the mid-1970s, applied sports psychology has grown rapidly on a worldwide level. Sports psychology, as a discipline, is committed to research and application of knowledge that promotes health and excellence in athletic performance. Studies performed by sports psychologists have found that successful athletes report using positive imagery to visualize success more frequently than less successful athletes.^{3,4} In general, research in sports psychology shows that educationally-based psychological interventions significantly improve athletes' competition performances. Athletes who consistently practice psychological skills, compared to those who do not, demonstrate higher levels of concentration, self-confidence, more positive thinking, and better focus on the performance and learning process.⁵⁻⁷

Visualizing or more general mental imaging is a natural intersection between dance education and psychological skills training. Overby found that dancers with five or more years of training reported that imagery was a significant part of their training.⁸ She surveyed 44 dance teachers and found that teachers very frequently use visual and kinesthetic imagery in the dance studio. Visual imagery involves forming a mental picture, in contrast kinesthetic imagery involves imagining what the movement felt like. Overby's survey included indirect imagery, defined as metaphorical images indirectly related to a specific movement like, "imagine walking and turning as if there were no gravity to keep you earth bound."

Overby cites three uses of dance imagery found in the literature: facilitating correct alignment, enhancing kinesthetic perception, and encouraging creative movement exploration. She also points out

that dance teachers appear to use mental imagery as an integral part of dance classes while athletes typically participate in mental training programs in addition to their physical training.⁸

Lewis⁹ makes a connection between Sweigard's Ideokinesis and a meta-analysis done by sports psychologists, Feltz and Landers,¹⁰ who reviewed 60 scientifically controlled experiments in the literature which demonstrated that mental practice of motor skills positively influences physical performances. Two controlled studies done by sports psychologists looking at the effects that mental imagery has on the body will be reviewed. In the first study, Hale looked at different types of imagery and its effect on involuntary muscular responses in weight lifters, testing the hypothesis that internal images would have more of an effect on physiological measures than external images.

Internal imagery is categorized as being in the first person with kinesthetic and visual aspects; a person actually images being inside her body and experiencing those sensations that might be expected in the actual situation. In the internal imagery condition participants were asked to, "imagine what it feels like in your biceps to lift a 25 lb. dumbbell." In the other condition, external images are mental pictures, as a person would view himself or herself from the perspective of an observer. These participants were told to, "visualize what it looks like to lift the 25 lb. dumbbell."

As predicted, the internal imagery perspective produced more localized muscular responses as measured by EMG activity in the biceps than the external imagery perspective. The researcher concluded that "imagery which more totally involves the individual in visual and kinesthetic experiences is more likely to produce localized neuromuscular outflow than merely visualizing and action."¹¹

This research gives validity to the imaging methods promoted by Sweigard as well as others who use internal visual and kinesthetic images to enhance specific muscular movements. The theory states that mental imagery improves alignment and movement coordination by altering reflexive, unconscious pathways within the nervous system and gives dancers and teachers ways to transcend unwanted physical habits that interfere with the fullest expression of bodily freedom in dance. Dowd's text, *Taking Root to Fly*, includes artistically rendered anatomical illustrations that guide dancers through kinesthetic explorations. Dowd takes poetic license in writing about dancers, "thinking and dreaming of metaphoric pathways through the human body."¹²

The second study, by sports psychologists Harris and Robinson, suggests that localized muscular innervation, as measured by EMG activity in the del-

toid muscles during imagery practice, appears to affect specific muscle groups necessary to execute the task. Researchers tested the effects of internal versus external imagery on beginner and advanced level karate students to study the effect of images on levels of performance. The advanced level karate students compared with beginning level students reported using more internal imagery, and overall displayed significantly more EMG activity using imagery. These findings show that athletes with more skill mastery have a more internalized perspective on their performance than athletes with less mastery. Based on these results, it seems advisable to use more internal, kinesthetically-based images with advanced level dancers, while external, visual imagery seems to work better for beginning students. In addition, meditation practices showed reduced muscular tension levels for both groups, thus supporting the use of relaxation training for students of all levels.¹³

The question of what type of mental imagery will help what level performer doing which specific type of movement was addressed in a study by Hanrahan and Salmela.¹⁴ Also of interest were the dancers' perceptions of the usefulness of imagery. Researchers looked at lines of movement imagery based on Sweigard's work, which is believed to direct a flow of energy in the body. The following is an example of lines of movement imagery used in the study for *développé*: "Imagine a light source deep in your hip socket sending a thin laser beam through and beyond your *développé* leg." Global imagery, not specific to any part of the body, may be used for different movements. The researchers suggested, "Imagine your whole body is thin and luminous," for the *développé* movement.

Comparisons were made between the dancers' perception of usefulness and objective measures of three different movements: *relevé*, *développé* and *battement*. The study showed that for different movements, different images appeared to be more effective. Global imagery facilitated the *développé* movement more than line of movement imagery. However, when reviewing the graphed data it appears to this writer that line of movement imagery had some effect on performance as well. It is possible that individual differences in dancers' movements account for a lack of significance for the line of movement condition. Lines of movement imagery may have a strong effect for some dancers, and for other dancers this type of imagery may be disorienting or distracting. For some dancers, the detailed and internal nature of lines of movement imagery may take more time to coordinate competently with actual movement. In my classes, I have observed that students with

more technical ability tend to grasp more complex imagery more quickly than other students.

Other results in the study highlight the importance of a personalized approach to mental imagery in order to optimize its effectiveness with dance movement. For example, dancers reported an increase in comfort level using lines of movement imagery for the relevé and battement movements. They did not report a significant level of comfort for the global imagery used for the développé even though this image objectively improved execution of the movement. One dancer reported “getting into” an image that actually showed deterioration in her performance; her leg during battement was actually lower in posttest after using the image. The authors speculated that, “it is however possible that a finely tuned expert observation might have detected a difference in the artistic or aesthetic quality of her performance.”¹⁴ The authors emphasize the importance of dancers’ subjective experiences and at the same time point out the need for objective feedback from teachers, mirrors, audience, and critics in order to know how they are actually performing. Mental imagery research, looking at skill level, learning style, personal preferences, and quality of movement can guide educators in selecting helpful images for students.

Hanrahan and Salmela’s study showed no difference in dancers’ preferring lines of movement imagery or global imagery in terms of how much they felt the images helped and how likely they were to use the imagery again. In this writer’s experience teaching imagery techniques, dancers form preferences for the types of imagery they use. The difference may be that in Hanrahan and Salmela’s study, dancers were exposed to one 30-minute training in using mental imagery. Without practice, repeated exposure, and feedback, dancers do not learn to use images most adeptly.¹⁴

Personalizing Mental Imagery

In psychological skills training classes, dance consultants assist dancers in customizing their mental skills practices. To help personalize imagery practices, dancer students are asked questions like, “What is it about your dancing that is important to you?” “What do or don’t you like about your dancing?” “How do you want to feel while dancing?” “What comes to mind when the energy and movement are flowing well?” Dancers practice re-creating feelings of favorite performances and discover images that capture high energy and emotional experiences. This sort of free association is encouraged to strengthen the connection between mind and body. Through introspection and discussion in class, dancers gain greater access to their intentions for their dancing. Confi-

dentiality is a concern due to the personal nature of some of the discussions in class. Students are asked to be respectful of each other, and to keep all parts of the discussion private. Building trust between students and consultant is an important part of the process.

Dance students can create mental images that capture emotions they wish to infuse into their movements. I refer to felt images as images that generate feelings within dancers. Felt images can focus on facial expression, dramatic qualities of movement, significant memories, fantasies, and interpersonal emotional dynamics that conjure up a deep and full range of feeling. By meditating in stillness on felt images dancers generate an intensity and clarity of focus for themselves that when used in dance can help convey profound meaning in movement. This effect is like dancers moving to the directions of a choreographer’s vision; only the dancer discovers and defines for himself or herself the personal meaning within the movement. “Even with highly accomplished performers, there are often new and helpful uses that imagery can serve in the process of skill development. Application of imagery can open up new dimensions to training, preparation and competition that breathe fresh life into a sport career.”¹⁵

Some students bring in pictures that they find inspiring, some of which I have turned into slides to project for greater effect. In class, dancers experiment with different forms of imagery sometimes with music. Students especially seem to enjoy the imagery exercises where they are encouraged to image themselves like creatures portrayed in Disney’s *Fantasia*, half human and half fantasy. To the extent that dancers are grounded within themselves with some basic ability in using kinesthetic imagery, these types of exercises can be effective in transforming dance movement that gives more opportunities for creative self-expression.

Changing and opening up to new movement possibilities through the use of imagery methods has its challenges. Imagery techniques can test a dancer’s ability to trust her own positive internal guidance. At times, internal critical voices, feelings of disorientation, or emotional blocks may sabotage the sincerest efforts to develop desired images. These sorts of negative responses restrict creativity and diminish self-confidence. Franklin cautions that mental images are connected to one’s sense of identity, and that altering these images stimulates profound internal transformations releasing powerful emotions.¹⁶ With change, there is often a conflict between trying something unfamiliar, or staying with what is known, even if it means holding on to unnecessary tension that restricts freedom of movement expression. Through discussions with the consult-

ant, dancers gain a healthier perspective of their negative responses, and a clearer mental outlook. In this way, dance training, an extraordinary vehicle for personal development, can give young people more ways to grow and use their imagination.

Bruce Ogilive, who has conducted sports psychology with elite athletes for over 35 years, believes it is necessary to prepare a mental environment where there is clarity of feelings in order to most successfully use mental images. From his perspective, the key to performers making real and lasting changes is through increasing self-awareness and working with authentic emotions.¹⁷ In performance enhancement training dancers learn to label genuine feelings and deepen their emotional connection to their movements. Dancers are likely to spontaneously create transforming images for themselves as they deepen their involvement in their movement through mental practice. Lewis writes that dance students may form, "a deep identity with their images."¹⁹

Some Practical Applications of Mental Imagery

When working with alignment in performance enhancement classes, lines of movement imagery are learned and then practiced in the constructive rest position with SELF breathing. To help dancers understand Sweigard's lines of moment and form effective images, students color in drawings from the *The Anatomy Coloring Book*,¹⁸ while viewing a series of slides that project anatomically correct, bigger than life images, lines of movement imagery onto the walls of the dance studio. A skeletal model is a great teaching tool that allows dancers to explore the body's many dimensions of physical support and movement. Inspiring quotes from respected dancers are brought into class like that of Martha Graham who wrote, "In a dancer there is a reverence for such forgotten things as the miracle of the small beautiful bones and their delicate strength."¹⁸

In class, dancers practice visualizing Sweigard's nine lines of movement and other types of kinesthetic imagery for 10 to 15 minute intervals. The consultant prepares imagery exercises based on the dancers' level of experience and psychological tendencies. I have found that dancers with greater levels of technical mastery are able to absorb more complex kinesthetic images like those created by Dowd. Franklin's two volume set is a rich assortment of visual information on alignment and dynamic movement, and dancers are encouraged to discover images that work for them.^{16,20} During the imagery sessions dancers also practice SELF breathing by setting up the image during the inhalation, and visualizing the desired movement while exhaling.

Follow-up discussions lead to further insights that help clarify dancers' sensations and intentions for their dancing. During reflective discussions, consultants respond empathically to dancers' experiences, and ask questions that help lead students into new and deeper perceptions regarding themselves and their dancing. Follow-up guided imagery exercises are then constructed using selected images that build on the dancers' self-discoveries. Sweigard's lines of movement imagery are included in these guided imagery exercises to ground the process in the body and kinesthetic imagery. Just as dance technique provides dance students with more self-assurance and creative movement possibility, lines of movement imagery gives dancers a secure base to move into transforming felt imagery.

After psychological skills training class, dancers return to dance class and may approach movements with an altered frame of mind, receptive to new sensations and images. This cycle of practicing mental imagery and self-exploration with the help of the consultant, and applying mental techniques in dance class with feedback from the dance teachers focuses and accelerates the learning process. In this way, felt images, which reflect emotional wishes, may be blended or layered with kinesthetic and visual imagery, creating more focused force for the dancer. There are professional dancers who use this type of reflective approach to some extent; the difference when working with a consultant is that there is a more systematic, deliberate, and complete cultivation of one's psychological potential.²¹

Self-created images help cement desired dance movements, and become part of an ideal performance script.¹⁵ One of the goals of performance enhancement training is creating an ideal performance script by linking influential images, cue words, and inspiring phrases and sensations that flow naturally from actual movement.

As an example of the effective employment of this technique, of integrating mental skills with dance performance, one of my dance students had choreographed a dance piece for an upcoming performance, and several of the dancers in his dance were also taking my class. For one of our meetings the choreographer brought in music and taught a part of the dance to the entire class. Next, students were guided through relaxation/alignment imagery in the constructive rest position. The choreographer then had dancers listen to the music while remaining in the constructive rest position. As the dancers visualized moving to the music, the choreographer described images as part of performance script that class members followed

mentally. After going through the imagery exercise, some dancers reported feeling more relaxed and prepared for the end of the year performance.

Dancers are asked to keep journals to record for themselves what images are working. As an end of the year assignment, students make a 20-minute alignment/movement audiotape that reinforces their use of mental imagery. Each student also creates a weekly psychological practice schedule that sets aside 10 to 15 minutes 3 to 4 days a week for mental practice. Students plan what types of mental practices will be used for different aspects of dance training and performance. Updating psychological programs on a regular basis gives dancers a creative edge.

Conclusion

Dance is an extraordinary vehicle for personal development. Including psychological skills training in dance education increases opportunities for creative self-expression, self-awareness, learning, and mastery. Students are encouraged to test the power of their imagination. A psycho-educational method, BRAVE, was outlined that includes conscious breathing, relaxation, and imagery techniques. Different types of imagery provide students with different benefits, and personalizing the use of imagery is recommended for optimal effects. Kinesthetic and lines of movement imagery are indicated for more advanced students, while visual and external images may be more helpful for beginning dance student. Emotionally derived, felt imagery adds focus and personal motivation to dance movements.

Research shows that some methods of visual and kinesthetic mental imagery have localized effects within the body, which substantiates Sweigard's Ideokinesis method, and the use of lines of movement imagery to improve alignment. As dance educators understand more about the value of psychological methods, they can create additional applications for their dance classes. Psychological skills offer multiple benefits whereby students discover meaningful ways to achieve success, satisfaction, and a belief in themselves and their creative potential.

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