

Alexander Technique and Dance Technique Applications in the Studio

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Summary

Integrating principles from the Alexander Technique into a dance technique class can provide tools for facilitating a more coordinated use of the self. While the methodologies of Alexander Technique and dance technique may present differences, there are ways of applying the principles of Alexander within the context of a dance technique class that open doors to new ways of working. Six themes found in the Alexander work and ways of incorporating these principles in a dance class are presented. The experiential activities provided illustrate the themes, followed by suggestions for reinforcing these principles as they are applied to dance movement.

Everyone is always teaching one what to do, leaving us still doing the things we shouldn't do.¹

As a teacher of both dance technique and Alexander Technique, I have been invested in the integration of the two practices in the education of dancers since certifying as an Alexander teacher in 1990. Initially, as I began exploring ways to incorporate Alexander Technique into dance classes, I discovered more challenges than successes, due to discrepancies in the teaching methodologies and philosophical viewpoints of the two fields. However, the personal benefits and the

improvements I experienced in my own dancing motivated me to persevere in my quest to develop teaching strategies for incorporating the Alexander Technique in dance training.

Within the structure of a dance technique class, finding methodologies for integrating Alexander concepts can be particularly challenging. The Alexander Technique is designed to be taught through private lessons. The teacher uses her hands, along with verbal instructions, to elicit changes in the student's fundamental movement patterns. This one-on-one training offers students the opportunity to receive specific feedback about patterns of movement and ingrained habits of which they might be unaware. The focus of this practice is on the individual. This contrasts with the nature of the dance technique class, where teachers must necessarily give attention to a group.

Other philosophical differences between traditional dance technique training and work in the Alexander Technique also pose challenges for the dance teacher. First, the Alexander Technique is rooted in the notion of "non-doing," while dancers have often been trained with the mindset of "doing." Second, the idea of correcting or "fixing" students is a common approach in a dance setting, while learning how to "not do" before proceeding with a new approach to a movement is central to the Alexander Technique. Third, dance students and teachers are inclined to be concerned with the end result, while the Alexander Technique focus is on the process for getting to that end result, referred to by F. M. Alexander as the "means whereby."

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While the Alexander Technique in its purest form cannot be taught in a dance technique class, principles of the Technique can certainly be illustrated and explored. Following are six themes found in the Alexander work, with experiential activities annotated in Tables 1 through 6. Once students have experienced these activities, they can begin to apply the information to simple dance sequences. Suggestions for reinforcing the principles within the context of technique classes follow the explanation of each theme. For more information about the Alexander Technique, a list of suggested readings and a brief definition of the Technique are included at the end of the article.

Unreliable Sensory Appreciation

“Everyone wants to be right, but no one stops to think that their idea of right is right.”²

All of us have undoubtedly had the experience of being surprised when given a correction from a dance teacher that challenges our own ideas of what is right. For example, if you have been standing with your weight too far back and are given a correction to shift your weight more forward, it is likely that you will feel that the new position you are placed in is “wrong.” It feels wrong to you because your habitual way of standing feels normal to you, even

though it may not be the most optimal. Alexander called this phenomenon “Unreliable Sensory Appreciation.”

“Sensory appreciation conditions conception—you can’t know a thing by an instrument that is wrong.”³

We therefore cannot necessarily rely on our sense of feeling to change a habit. Habit in this context does not refer to habits of *action*, such as cracking one’s knuckles or biting one’s fingernails, but to habits of *feeling*, or proprioception, that underlie our habitual patterns of movement.⁴ What we think we are doing is often not what we are actually doing. The movement experiences in Table 1 are designed to illustrate the concept of Unreliable Sensory Appreciation.

Becoming aware of a habit can be frustrating in the beginning—ignorance is bliss, as the saying goes. But it is important for students to realize that awareness is the first step toward making change. To incorporate this concept into technique classes, I suggest finding times during the class where students observe and give feedback to each other. Encourage them to share their observations without judgment, but rather with the idea of bringing habitual patterns into consciousness. This cultivates students’ observation and communica-

Table 1 Unreliable Sensory Appreciation: Walking/Observing Exercise

1. Divide into groups of three. One person from the group: take a walk around the room, as if you were walking down the street. You might make up a scenario of some kind, so that you minimize the self-consciousness of the walk. Notice others around you as you walk, so that you pay attention to yourself and to the environment at the same time. After establishing the walking pattern, return to your group and receive feedback from the others about your walking pattern. Those observing should be instructed to simply notice tendencies, such as:
 - What part or parts of the foot take the weight?
 - What is the sequence of initiations in the walk?
 - Is there a part of the body that tends to lead? To fall behind?
 - Do you notice any parts that are held?
 - What do the arms do?
 - Where is the focus?
 - Do you notice any asymmetries?
 - What type of movement quality do you observe in the walk?

When discussing the walk, avoid the tendency to make value judgments (“It was good, it would be better if...” and so forth). Simply point out observations. When listening to the feedback, accept the information with curiosity and interest, rather than assigning value or judgment to the comments.

Did any of the comments come as a surprise to you? It is usual to have things brought to your attention of which you had not been aware.
2. Alternative walking/observing exercise:

Choose partners and take a walk through the space with Partner A in front and Partner B in back. B, try to copy the walk of A as exactly as you can. Embody every aspect of the walk. Slip into her skin. Notice the way she initiates the walk, the carriage of the spine, how you feel.⁵ Partner B, once you have established a clear sense of A’s walk, ask A to stop walking. B: continue walking in the style of A, while A observes.

This exercise speaks clearly without words, and is sometimes more effective than the first walking/observing exercise.

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tion skills as well as providing another method of feedback for students besides the teacher and the mirror.

Psychophysical Unity: Use Affects Function

"You can translate everything, whether physical, mental or spiritual, into muscular tension."⁶

The "self" is a psychophysical unity: body, mind, and emotion. Alexander believed that a person acts as a whole; the body and mind cannot be divided. It follows that specific habits cannot be separated from the use of the whole organism, or "self." In the Alexander Technique, focus is on the improvement of the entire system. When you are able to change the way you coordinate yourself as a whole, your specific habits improve consequentially.

I will relate a story from my own experience to illustrate this concept. As a young dancer, I was plagued with knee problems. The pain occurred gradually, not as a result of a specific incident. I tried

the usual treatments such as rest, ice, ibuprofen, and strengthening exercises. Each remedy helped for a short period of time, but the pain continued to recur. Eventually, through a series of Alexander lessons, I discovered my habitual patterns of use that had created the conditions leading to the occurrence of my knee pain. These habitual patterns included overly tight abdominals, a tendency to tuck the pelvis and flatten the fronts of the hip joints, and overusing the muscles in the legs. These patterns of movement had to be addressed before the symptom of knee pain was eventually eradicated.

The emotional component is also integral to the functioning of the whole person. Emotions such as joy or depression are factors in the way we hold or carry ourselves. For example, muscular holding or protective postures occurring as the result of traumatic experiences may, over time, become part of an individual's total pattern. Alternately, assuming postural qualities associated with lightness or happiness may have a positive influence on the overall emotional state of an individual.

Table 2 Psychophysical Unity; Use Affects Function

1. Choose partners (A and B) and stand beside each other. The first step is to locate the bottom of the skull and become familiar with the delicate balance of the skull on the first cervical vertebra (atlas). Partner A, use a gentle touch to trace the bottom of the back of Partner B's skull, and find the two curves that make up the bottom of the occiput. Find the dent at the back of the neck, where the skull balances. See how the head nods at this junction.
2. Partner A: put your hands on B in the following way: standing to B's left, place your right hand just under her occipital bone, with fingers toward the right ear, and thumb toward the left ear. Your left hand will be placed on B's forehead. The hands should be easy, soft, and lengthened, as opposed to tight or gripped. The elbows should be easily dropped, not lifted.
First, just sense the way the skull sits lightly on the first cervical vertebra. Then move the head very gently and delicately. Choose various directions to the head, being careful not to establish a rhythm or regular pattern.
B: simply let A move your head. Keep your eyes open, so that you maintain an awareness of the room and environment as well as yourself.
Once a free and easy movement is established (to the best of both partners' abilities), ask B to tighten a muscle or muscle group. This could be anywhere in the body (examples: abdominals, quadriceps, toes, biceps). Observe what happens at the head and neck.
3. Go back to the free and easy movement of the head again as above. This time, ask B to just think of a dance movement that is difficult to do. Observe what happens at the head and neck.
4. In partners, again, partner B sits in a chair. Partner A: try to get B out of the chair by facing her, holding on to wrists or hands, and simply pulling her up to standing. Try this exercise four times, asking B to think the following thoughts in sequence:
 1. You are very, very tired.
 2. You are very eager to please A and to do what you think she wants you to do.
 3. You decide that you absolutely do not want to get up out of the chair.
 4. Just think about your neck being free, and think of allowing your head to go forward and up.
 Observe and discuss the different experiences. How can the same body, weighing the same amount, feel so different?

These exercises illustrate the vital connection of the body, mind, and spirit. In Exercise 2, students usually notice an immediate tightening or a change in the way the head moves as soon as the partner contracts any muscle group in the body. A tightening in one area is reflected in the head and neck area. This demonstrates the effects that undue tension and patterns of holding have upon the whole organism, and especially the neck. Exercise 3 demonstrates the relationship of thinking and emotion to muscular action. When bracing or stiffening is the initial response to a stimulus, it is unlikely that a free and coordinated movement will ensue.

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A goal of the Alexander Technique is to give students tools to make choices about the way they employ physical, emotional, and intellectual functions. The aim is to “create the conditions necessary for ‘natural functioning’ through a balanced distribution of energy, each part of the system performing its own work in harmony with the rest.”⁷

To gain an understanding of the unity of the self, see Table 2 for movement experiences.

Learning to view oneself as a whole organism, rather than an assemblage of parts, benefits dance students as they navigate through their various technique classes and rehearsals, and gives them a different perspective when dealing with injuries and pain. The thought that “I have bad ankles,” assumes that somehow “I” do not have much to do with the problem, effectively separating the mind from the body. Instead, a student can begin to see that it is the way he is functioning that is affecting his ankles. To enhance one’s functioning, one must make improvements in one’s overall patterns of use. To improve use of a part, one must improve use of the whole.

For the dance teacher, this philosophy encourages looking at the dance student as a whole person. Correction of parts becomes less viable than addressing an overall pattern of movement, and teachers need to recognize that there is a belief system behind the choices the student makes.

Primary Control

*This **primary control** is made up of the processes which control the use of the head and neck in relation to the body, and enables us to use ourselves in the right way⁸*

The dynamic relationship of the head to the neck,

and of both the head and neck in relation to the back is central to one’s coordination, balance, and functioning. This ever-changing relationship is termed “Primary Control.” “Ever-changing relationship” is a key concept here; it is not a search for the correct positioning of the head on the spine, but rather, a discovery of a poised relationship of the balance of the head on the spine that is free and ready for movement. In order to facilitate this, it is helpful to think of allowing the neck to be free. This means that the head can move in any direction without unlocking to move. Learning to use primary control is key to finding a coordinated use of the whole system.

The best way to observe primary control in action is to watch movements of creatures unencumbered by ineffectual habits, such as a baby who is learning to crawl, sit, and walk; a cat jumping; or a leopard running. In these examples, you can clearly see the poised relationship of the head, neck, and torso, leading to coordinated and efficient movements. In both four-legged and two-legged creatures, the head leads and the body follows.

See Table 3 for experiences that address the concept of Primary Control.

In a dance technique class setting, teachers can use the concept of “primary control” by reminding students not to lock the muscles of the neck (“allow the neck to be free”), and to experiment with initiating movements from the eyes first, allowing the head and then the body to follow. While it may not be appropriate to sequence all dance movements this way, exploring the idea of “head leads, body follows” can facilitate improved use of the whole system. Once students begin to experience and understand the coordinated use that is gained through the effective balance of the head in relation

Table 3 Primary Control—Head Leads, Body Follows

1. Take a walk around the room, maintaining an awareness of yourself and of the environment, including those around you. Walk in a straight path, then decide to look in a different direction. See how you naturally turn to go into that direction. Whenever you want to change direction, look first. See how the body follows.
2. Begin to speed up the walk, and take it into an easy jog. Continue the thought of leading with the focus. Vary the directions, shift the weight, use a soft plié, allow the torso to accommodate and bend in different directions. FREEZE. Notice your position, where you sense holding or tension. Ask yourself to free the neck, and let it adjust forward and up. What do you notice in the rest of the body? Repeat the exercise several times. Discuss the differences that you felt when you took a moment to think about freeing the neck.
3. Try the idea of head leading and body following, using any of the following dance movements. Prior to performing the movement, visualize the head leading into the direction. Allow the body to follow.
 - Piqué forward to arabesque from a tendu plié to the front
 - Port de bras forward
 - From a high arch backward, come up to vertical stance.

Primary control is best learned in private lessons with the use of a skilled teacher’s hands. However, these exercises allow the student to begin to experience the subtle changes that occur in the use of the whole when one thinks of allowing the neck to be free, and the head to lead the body into action.

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to the neck and back, they can then explore this on a much subtler level. Simply thinking of the head leading and body following, even when another body part may be the initiator of the movement, will still stimulate the primary control.

Inhibition

When you stop doing the wrong thing the right thing does itself. – F. M. Alexander⁹

In the Alexander Technique, in order to initiate change, first it is necessary to inhibit or prevent our automatic way of responding to a stimulus. This step is perhaps the most difficult one for dancers, because inherent in our training is the stimulus to “do” or even “overdo,” rather than “not to do.” Stopping the initial response allows space for something different to occur, versus falling into one’s habitual pattern when performing the given movement. Rather than replacing an unwanted action with another action, we stop the unwanted action, thus opening the door to new possibilities.

The word “inhibition” can be misleading, therefore I find it is useful to talk about it in terms of stopping an initial response. Once you have identified an undesirable habit or response to a stimulus, the first thing to do is to learn to stop your impulse to move. For example, if I find that I clench my teeth as I begin to do a pirouette, I must learn NOT to make the first move toward clenching my teeth when I think of doing the pirouette. Once I have begun pirouetting, it is too late. This concept sounds simple, but can be difficult to put into practice. Once I can learn to stop my impulse to clench my teeth and instead direct myself to allow the neck to be free, I have created the possibility for a better coordination of my whole self. This does not mean that my pirouette will be immediately successful. But

in the long run, it will put me in a better condition for performing the pirouette. Over time, the improvement in the whole will translate into the improvements of specifics, such as the pirouette.

Inhibition, or learning to pause and think for a split second prior to making a decision to move, allows for choice over habit. Table 4 presents examples of experiences that illustrate the concept of inhibition.

Once students have experienced the concept of stopping themselves prior to initiating a movement, I suggest finding ways to encourage this practice by mixing up the way a combination starts. For example, try making a movement phrase where count “1” is an empty count, with no movement. Use this count to direct the students to think of not doing just prior to doing. You can direct them to think of allowing the neck to be free or to think of something other than the habitual preparation for the movement to come.

For teachers, the concept of inhibition can apply to the process of giving corrections to students. A teacher may have a tendency to point out everything she notices that is going wrong when a student performs a movement or combination. However, it can be more effective to inhibit one’s desire to “fix” all of the problems one sees, and instead, to encourage an investigative approach. I recommend observation of the student in a variety of contexts to see if one can notice patterns of movement, and then making suggestions to the student that address the initiation of the pattern.

Direction

*There is no such thing as a right position, but there is such a thing as a right **direction**.*¹⁰

After inhibiting the habitual response, the next step is to give oneself specific directions, which

Table 4 Inhibition

1. You will need a mirror for this exercise. First, take a walk around the room. FREEZE. Staying where you are, turn and look into the mirror. DO NOT make any adjustments, or try to correct what you think may be “wrong.” Resist the urge to correct. Notice what your tendencies are in this situation. Try this several times. On the third time, after practicing inhibiting the desire to correct your posture, think about allowing the neck to be free, and see if the head adjusts. Then THINK (don’t do) about the head adjusting forward and up of the spine, and allowing the back to lengthen and widen. See if the thoughts create any changes in muscular tone, in your breathing, or in your overall posture.
2. Choose a movement that you would like to work on. For example, I will use the movement from first position to a turned out passé. In partners, (A and B), Partner A: give a command to Partner B to perform a passé. Partner B: perform the passé. Both partners notice the manner in which B performs this movement. The next time, A, give the command, “passé,” and B, decide *not* to do the passé. Notice if there is any response to the command. Practice this a few times, so that B works on calmly not responding to the command. The next step is for B to give herself the thought of keeping the neck free while listening to the command. Then, try continuing the thought of neck free, and taking the foot off the ground slightly, as if to begin the passé. Can you maintain the idea of neck free while lifting the foot? If not, go back and practice doing nothing when hearing the command. Progress in this manner until you can perform the passé in a new way.

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involves a process of thinking with intention in preparation for movement. "Allow the neck to be free, so that the head may go forward and up, and the back may lengthen and widen." These directions should be thought, but not consciously translated into muscular action. This practice of "thinking" rather than "doing" is essential to counteract habitual muscular response.

It is common for dancers, when hearing "head forward and up," or "back lengthen and widen," to stiffen in order to "perform" these directions. This is a misconception! Stiffening is not a part of the Alexander Technique. A good check point for this is to continue to give the thought that the neck is free. If it has become stiff, you have been trying too hard.

"It is not the degree of willing or trying but the way in which the energy is directed, that is going to make the willing or trying effective."¹¹

Another common misunderstanding is the meaning of the phrase, "head forward and up." This does not mean you must take your head in the direction

of forward and up in space, related to your starting position. Rather, it describes a particular relationship of the head to the spine in which the head balances forward and upward in relation to the top of the spine, thereby allowing for a lengthening force on the neck, and subsequently on the spine. "The head can exert a lengthening force on the spine only if the neck muscles are not being habitually shortened."¹²

The best way to gain an understanding of the directions described by Alexander is through private lessons with a certified teacher. However, the experiences in Table 5 aim to illustrate the principles of direction and thinking in activity.

Within a technique class, the principle of "Direction" can be easily applied once students have had experience with thinking but not doing. Challenge students to simply think of the direction, or spatial intent of a movement prior to performing that movement. To facilitate this, it is helpful to invent movement phrases that can be performed with distal initiations: top of head, fingertips, or toes, for example. The distal initiations are conducive to the

Table 5 Direction

1. Find a partner, and both partners get on hands and knees. Crawl toward each other until the tops of your heads touch. Feel the length of your spine, from top of head to sit bones. Be careful not to lock your elbows, and not to hold your breath. Sense the head of your partner. Maintaining the head contact, take a small rock back and forth, sensing your own length, while sensing your partner's length at the same time. Continue experimenting with a small rocking movement forward and backward. Give yourself the thought of allowing the neck to be free, so that the head may move forward and up and the back may lengthen and widen. As you do so, maintain the contact with your partner. Then crawl away from each other, still remembering the sensation of your partner's head against your head. Keeping weight on your hands, place both feet on the floor, so that the weight is distributed between your two hands and two feet. Next, you are going to come to standing, in a manner similar to the movement of a toddler. To initiate this, rock the pelvis slightly up toward the ceiling. Then, maintaining awareness of the top of your head experienced with your partner, bring your head up, allowing your pelvis to find its place underneath. Do this in one simple and efficient motion; do not roll up through the spine.
2. Find your partner again, and stand next to each other, B in a neutral stance, feet neither turned in or out, and under the hip joints. Partner A: stand on the left side of Partner B and place your left hand on the front, top part of B's head, just behind the hairline. Be sure not to over-lift your elbow as you place a soft hand on the head. The right hand will go on the upper back. Take a minute to free your own neck. Partner B, just THINK of leaving your head with A's hand as you very slightly release (bend) your knees. Do not disengage from A's hand. At first, this may not seem possible, but you do not need to think of lowering yourself to bend the knees. Instead, think of just staying with your partner's hand to send the knees forward. At the same time, see if you can also leave your back with your partner's other hand. Partner A, you can give feedback to B about whether you feel her withdrawing from either hand as she takes this initiation for a plié. Encourage her not to stiffen to accomplish this, but rather, to use her power of thought. Watch that she is not holding in her hip joints, ankle joints, or her breathing as she releases her knees.
3. After both partners have had a turn to try Exercise 2, try doing a plié, either in first or second position, using the previous experience to initiate the plié. It is common to experience a sense of ease and lightness, a perception of less work in the legs. The direction of head forward and up allows the back to lengthen and widen, freeing the hips and giving them space for the movement of the plié to occur easily. While doing the plié, it is helpful to remind the students that:
 - The torso unit is from the top of the head to the sit bones (ischial tuberosities).
 - The legs are in front of the sit bones.
 - When the plié action is performed, send the knees forward and away.

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directions of lengthening and widening, allowing the student to experience a sense of expansiveness.

Primary and Secondary Curves—The Lively Interplay

In teaching the Alexander Technique to dancers, I am especially interested in helping them find freedom of movement at the joints, allowing ease of motion, efficiency in movement. Often, in the quest for being correct and in control, dancers tend to stiffen, or brace themselves. I have found that looking at Alexander Technique through the lens of developmental movement promotes a keener understanding of the principles of the Technique, and encourages the idea that

there is constant change and adjustment each time we make a move, versus a perfect posture or alignment that we are striving to achieve.¹³ All of the principles already discussed can be applied as one explores the ways that babies move through developmental stages. Let us look at one aspect of human development: primary and secondary curves. The primary curve is known as the “fetal curve,” the curve the baby is born with, which may also be described as a flexion of the spine. In the adult, the primary curves are the thoracic and sacral curves. The secondary curve can be described as a hyperextension of the spine. In the adult, the secondary curves of the spine are the cervical and lumbar regions. The fluidity of the spine lies in the interplay of these two kinds of curves.

Table 6 Primary and Secondary Curves

1. Begin on all fours in a crawling position, and then fold at the hip joints until you are in a folded position with the forehead and the forearms on the floor (similar to “Child Pose” in Yoga). The knees can be a comfortable distance apart, and the arms should be bent. Take a moment to encourage softening in the body, allowing the floor to take your weight. If you are uncomfortable in this position, try adjusting your leg position. (A mat can be helpful for this exercise.)
Very gently, look from side to side, rolling very slightly on the head, allowing the movement to travel through the body to the hip joints. Next, roll forward and back, onto the top of the head and back to the forehead.
Now, imagine that you want to see something in front of you. Begin to look forward and up, and let the body follow, so that you eventually end up sitting on your haunches. Notice that your head naturally adjusts and ends upright once you have come to the sitting position. Practice this several times, remembering to initiate the movement of looking forward and up with the eyes, as if to look at something. Can you do this without crunching the back of the neck? A partner’s hand on the back of the neck can be useful to give feedback about whether or not you are pulling down when doing the movement sequence.
When you were in the “Child Pose” position (folded), your back was in a primary curve. As you proceeded to look up, you began to go into a secondary curve. As you completed the movement sequence, your body should have adjusted itself to a neutral spine (normal primary and secondary curves), provided you did not interfere with the sequence through some kind of holding pattern. This natural adjustment is easy to observe in a baby as he arches his back during a spiral roll from his stomach to his back. After the arch to initiate the roll, the baby adjusts to more of a primary curve as he lands on his back.
2. Now lie on the floor on your side, in any variation of a primary curve. Take yourself into any secondary curve, initiating the action by looking out into the space. Now bring yourself back into a primary curve. Continue alternating between the two curves improvisationally. Notice that the secondary curve elicits a sense of going out into the world, whereas the primary curve’s focus tends to be more internal. Enjoy the experience of head leading and allowing the body to follow.
3. Come to standing, and look down at your feet. Notice that your body goes toward a primary curve. Look up to the ceiling. Your body goes toward a secondary curve.
4. Now swing the arms forward and back. Notice that when your arms swing forward, your back naturally adjusts toward a primary curve. As your arms swing behind you, your back can easily go into a secondary curve. Allow these curves to respond to the arm swing. Then see how subtle you can make it. Notice whether your head is adjusting freely.
5. Now take a tendu to the front from first position. Allow a very subtle adjustment toward primary curve. Return to a first position. Take a tendu to the back and allow a subtle adjustment to secondary curve. Return to first position. To observe this more carefully, place a hand at the back of your neck. Again, take the tendu front. See if you can allow an almost imperceptible adjustment of the head forward (primary curve) as you take the tendu. Try again, but leave the head fixed, allowing no adjustment. Notice how this makes the body stiffen.
6. Take a fourth position with the right foot front. Bend the left knee. The body adjusts slightly to a primary curve. Bend the right knee. The body adjusts slightly to a secondary curve. Play with this, going back and forth from one bent knee to the other. Try doing this without allowing any adjustment in the neck and back. Notice the affect that this has on the legs.

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Having an understanding, both intellectually and kinesthetically, of the spinal curves encourages dancers to allow for the natural adjustments that occur in the body, and especially at the top of the spine, as they perform movements. It also discourages the bracing and rigidity, or over-straightening that frequently happens as dancers strive to be "correct." See Table 6 for experiential activities that illustrate this concept of primary and secondary curves.

This information can be useful for teachers in many contexts. When inventing movement for class, look at your own movement preferences and consider whether you are allowing alternation between primary and secondary curves. As you teach your material, find ways of cueing students to allow the body to adjust from one curve to another, even if it is done very subtly at the very top of the spine. As you observe your students, notice their natural tendencies. For example, a student may have the propensity to be "locked" in secondary curve, making it difficult to experience a softening of the chest, or encouraging a lifted rib cage. Rather than giving corrections that address the rib cage or the chest, it might be useful to suggest an adjustment toward primary curve, starting at the top of the head, and relating this to the experiences from Table 6.

Outcomes

For dancers, discovering the natural, dynamic force of the body's design can be both exhilarating and confusing. As one learns to let go of holding patterns that once felt "normal," it is common to go through stages of feeling lost, of not knowing, of perceiving that one is not working hard enough. Indeed, students often experience periods of frustration during the process of undoing and relearning; however, gradually over time, the gains can be quite profound and long lasting. The Alexander Technique empowers the dancer to choose, rather than relying on habitual patterns of use that may be harmful or inappropriate to the demands of the movement. Learning the principles gives dancers tools that facilitate a coordinated use of the self and leads to a sense of poise and a capacity for efficiency and ease of motion.

Notes

A Definition of Alexander Technique

The Alexander Technique, developed by Frederick Matthias Alexander in the early 20th Century, is a method that teaches people to move with a greater

degree of ease and coordination. A practical technique, usually learned under the guidance of a skilled teacher, the method involves becoming aware of habitual patterns of movement, and learning procedures for freeing oneself from these habits. By learning to use the skills of conscious inhibition, directed thought, and reliable sensory perception, the individual is able to elicit his innate capacity for psychomotor coordination. (American Society for the Alexander Technique.)

Suggested Reading

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