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Mindful Learning

DT talks to author and educator Eric Franklin about the variety of ways to use imagery in the dance classroom.



Photography by Laura Hammes

Eric Franklin uses a model skeleton to teach anatomical principles to students at the Royal Danish Ballet school.

Have you ever heard the phrase, “It’s better to work smarter, not harder”? Olympic athletes and sports professionals often use mental drills to improve physical skills, but this approach also has the potential to help dancers gain concentration and confidence, improve technique and flexibility, avoid injury and increase their overall sense of satisfaction.

“We use imagery for quality and movement initiation, but that’s just a

very small segment of what you can do with it,” says Eric Franklin, a former dancer and creator of The Franklin Method, which combines mental visualization with an understanding of body mechanics. He first encountered this approach while studying ideokinesis (the use of mental focus on imagined actions to correct posture and movement) under André Bernard at New York University.

Today, as director of The Franklin-Method Institute in Uster, Switzerland,

he leads workshops and training programs at schools and professional companies, including The Juilliard School, The Royal Ballet School in London, the Royal Danish Ballet and school and Ballet de Monte-Carlo.

The Mind-Body Connection

“The mind changes its way of coordinating the body through seeing and sensing,” says Franklin, who earned a BS in sports sciences from the University of Zurich, and a BFA from

Imagery in Action

Exercise A

Complete the steps below to release shoulder tension and improve alignment during port de bras.

- 1 Place your right hand on your left shoulder (trapezius). Imagine your hand softening and relaxing the muscles of the shoulder.
- 2 Keep the right hand in place and perform shoulder rolls (circular movement) with your left shoulder.
- 3 Rest and simply imagine performing the shoulder rolls.
- 4 Gently squeeze the trapezius with your right hand as if it were a sponge. As you slowly release your grip, imagine the muscle as a sponge, spreading and widening as if it were filling with water. Repeat three times.
- 5 Perform a port de bras and notice the difference in feeling between the arms. Repeat the shoulder roll and "sponging" on the other side.

Exercise B

Picture the following images and note which ones improve the ease and quality of movement. Imagine that...

- 1 Puppet strings are attached to your wrists and elbows, and your arms are being lifted and moved by these strings. Attach strings to any part of your arm to aid in your movement.
- 2 Your arms are floating on clouds. These clouds lift and carry your arms into the right positions.
- 3 Your arms are a string of balloons floating through the correct port de bras positions.
- 4 Your arms are floating in water, and the water currents and the rising and falling water levels move your arms through the motions of a port de bras.

NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. "If I just tell you to imagine your head floating up like a balloon, nothing is going to happen." He believes that in order for imagery to be effective, it has to initiate sensation in the muscles and changes in the central programming in your brain: "If I say, imagine your head floating up like a balloon that is lengthening your neck, relaxing your shoulders and allowing you to feel freer, then I am connecting the picture with the sensation."

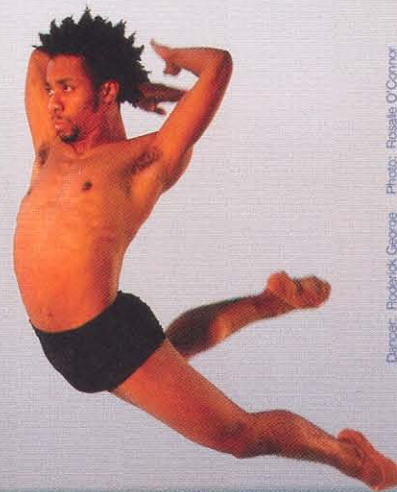
How It Works

Franklin explains that "the first step is to understand the function. The second step is to imagine the function in your body. The third is to apply that in movement." Rather than learning based on muscular repetition, students can use mental imagery to reinforce the biomechanical events actually happening in the body, thereby making the physical act more efficient and easy to perform.

"Anatomy gives you the blueprint of how to make the body function

When AIDS is stopped we will dance for

Joy



Dancer: Frederick George Photo: Rosalee O'Connor

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Life

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