



## **Feldenkrais-Methode® für Ballett-Tänzer/Innen** **Feldenkrais-Method® for ballet dancers**

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I discovered how supportive the Feldenkrais-work - group-lessons and single sessions - is for the precise and demanding tasks of ballet. This method is based on kinaesthetic awareness. Through the offerings of special movements and questions one learns to feel every little part of ones own body and to become aware how the positions of the articulations are interconnected. The method is primarily not about right or wrong but gives many options how to perform a movement and to find a solution for a task. This way the pupil learns to differentiate and to choose what is useful for the very moment and the very function. For example the dancer will feel inside what she needs to do for a high battement without tilting the pelvis or a brilliant flow and length from head to feet.

The advantage is that the Feldenkrais-Method® is rather showing how to get more clarity about movement functions and to become able to choose the demanded direction and balanced energy for ballet positions and interconnections.

Even when we offer beautiful images for alignment or great pictures about the skeleton like in ideokinesis or in Gyrokinesis: Feldenkrais helps to realize those advises. Many dancers can better transform those

helps after having experienced the kinaesthetic interconnectedness of the bones and joints. Only now they can observe the positions and truly sense the directions and the quantity of demanded tension within their skeletal and muscular parts.

For example it is not easy and not for granted to know where your pubic bone goes during a rond de jambe or how the interrelatedness of the atlas and the sternum is while we perform a cambré.

From the view of the Feldenkrais-principles I choose between three ways to support ballet dancers in their development towards expressive artists and for good health and a longer career :

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I keep the Feldenkrais-Method® pure, i.e. as it is originally  
I choose or create lessons particularly meant for ballet poses and movements

I combine the principles of kinaesthetic sensitivity and free choice between various solutions with energy flow and helpful imaginations : IdeoKinaesthetic.energymovements.placement (C)METHOD I: pure Feldenkrais-Method®®

ATM and FI

I can take the group-lessons „Awareness through Movement“ or single sessions of touching and moving the dancer, called „Functional Integration“, just like they are: pure and unchanged. I choose adequate examples for the special requests of ballet like balancing on relevé, frappés( movements of the knees) or the turnout ( a general principle ). Many experiences with my ensemble, my students and myself show, that I could help to reduce pain or other problems, for example strain on the knees or the lumbar area . Obviously the given additional patterns and solutions for the requested positions of ballet are changing the bodyschema of the performers and effecting an amazing ease while moving. This brings with it stage brilliance and expressiveness of the artist.

a) The Feldenkrais-Method® focuses on the unit within the skeletal network as a whole and emphasizes the connections between the movements. The work does both in every lesson/session: you put your attention towards very subtle movements and awareness around joints or muscular areas and you always link these sensations with the whole system of movements including the brain and nervous system. You never can pull out one reason for a problem or a better solution. The wonderful movement apparatus is a cybernetic system and a combination

of patterns and linkages of troubles or flexibility. Therefore the work helps not only to move more economically and to have less pain, it also helps sensing the relationships between the joints and observing the functions. For example within the inner imagination of the relationship between the sitbones and the femur or between the hipjoints and the feet will become clear, i.e. the dancer is kinaesthetically aware/conscious. For everybody who knows how difficult it is, to keep the pelvis symmetric while pushing the working leg up (battement; kick), it is logical that it is a precondition to be able to kinaesthetically perceive the bodyparts and the directions of the legs and the spine movements. This is important for performing the balletic aesthetic AND not to injuring the joints because of distortion. That concerns skeletal and physiological health of the dancer.

In ATM the teacher advises scanning through the whole body and guides to becoming more conscious of all that interconnectedness. This leads to new patterns, offers the choice between different options and so reduces the stress on the iliosacral joints, the knees, the lumbar spine, ... finally every area in danger. The dancers begin to use their joints in a different way and to put not more tension on the cartilages, the ligaments, all soft tissue and the bones, than necessary.

Furthermore each individual dancer can discover her /his own way to become more free from bad habits or any fixed habits. Sometimes it might also be necessary to respect the limits of the individual body and to find better ways within the range of a particular body.

There are even some already existing Feldenkrais-lessons which almost directly lead to specific request of ballet technique. For example the lessons about turning/tortion while lying on the back or sitting are a wonderful preparation for pirouettes. They give the sensations of how to turn along the spine and so also differentiate between head, torso and legs and preparing for spotting. b) These explications lead to another aspect of dance: the art, which

is of course for the career and the success of dancers and choreographers at the very center. As we study in Feldenkrais-work all possible directions of joints, as we learn combinations and complex coordinations of movements and as we explore different qualities we are already within the fields of creativity, improvisation, and of course in the midst of choreography. Here is the border toward the system of Rudolf von Laban, the methods of Merce Cunningham, the processes of William Forsythe and so on.

c) For the performance of a piece and every movement the Feldenkrais-Method® has a third effect: the dancer will be present because she/he is just aware of her even subtlest movements, the directions, the power/weight, and the flow and quality. She must not express more than that, she must not show additional feelings nor amplify her expressiveness. When she is really sensing the movements kinaesthetically she has a great presence and a brilliant aura. Then she/he is truly here and authentic.

### METHOD II: SPECIAL LESSONS FOR BALLET

I am often creating new lessons as special preparations for poses, movements, or exercises of ballet. Above all lessons where one feels and creates different relations between leg and pelvis (like lying on the back and moving both knees to one side, let us say to the right, but towards different directions in the right side). The student is asked to sense what is happening in any correlation in the right and in the left hipjoint. She learns in a very subtle way to sense inside what she/he does spontaneously with her body and what other patterns are possible. Here are also other body parts belonging to the function (movement task) like the ribs or the neck: do they hold on, stiffening, go they with- and in which direction? And then I let them experiment with all those possibilities and more. So finally the student can differentiate between her own habit and many options and finally choose the wanted movement in ballet-technique: normally the separations of the legs and keeping the pelvis on place.

One example: The battement

The main request in ballet is precisely separating the legs from the torso. To do so there is a useful precondition: to kinaesthetically feel the movement of the great trochanter and its relation to both sitbones. This feeling or awareness allows often to perform the needed movement; but also it allows little deviations which might be better for the process of learning or an individual body. One lesson I invented here is:

Lying on the back, upright legs; then the dancer lifts one, later both legs. I give her questions about what is happening with her pelvis while lifting one or both legs; later I advise her: first to move the pelvis together with the legs = both as a unit = in the same direction, and later to arch the back while lifting the legs. Slowly we discover variations in between these two let's say extremes. Finally we can easily choose the one needed ballet-option: to keep the pelvis and torso during the whole movement parallel to the floor. This means the dancer discovers the right correlation/interaction between leg and

torso in ballet - with all its implications: the feeling of the muscular work , the directions of the sitbones, the images of the legs...

As I am a Feldenkrais- teacher and a dancer I can offer the different patterns - even „wrong“ ones (in terms of ballet) in comparison to right ones - like options or menus. So the pupil/dancer can sense the kinaesthetic difference and choose . This is the way she/he becomes more and more clear about what she does and what is requested; she becomes free and flexible. And she is not dependent upon one habit for the rest of her life. For walking in everyday life it might be necessary to be able to put the feet parallel or to move the legs together with the pelvis. It can be very damaging to stick on one habitual pattern.

For ballet or modern battements, for arabesques, for piqué turns and many other movements of ballet training and stage work there is this already mentioned necessity of differentiating both legs from each other and from the torso or the pelvis. The dancer needs that ability for both staying healthy and the artistic goal of dance shape and aesthetic. To sense kinesthetically in detail what happens that takes time and help; the dancer is more accustomed to look at the mirror or at the teacher. But only when she really feels what happens inside her own body and when she is free to choose between options ,i.e. choose the right one, her dancing gets ease and elegance. When she stays either in her own prison or that of a strict technique then she does not look like an artist .

One other privilege we have here: she is still able to choose further more relations between her limbs , torso...which is needed in other techniques, for example buto or new dance or Forsythe's Style ... . And she is not becoming so stiff as many ballet dancers do meanwhile keeping the difficult shapes. METHOD III :

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I developed a combination of different accesses beginning from the principles of a sensitive bodywork toward the needs ballet dancers. The goal is to support every individual and to help with different problems of finding the precise form without damaging the body and without pain, but providing more ease and elegance. My instruments are:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

kinaesthetic/proprioceptive work,  
imaginative (ideo-) and

energy-work

AND a flexible use (sequence) of all that three ways.

For dancers and particularly ballet dancers, for technique and improvisation, pictures and imaginations are very useful as I learned in my education in GENTLE DANCE and KINÄSTHETIK. My trainers ( Dr. Lenny Maietta, Dr. Frank Hatch, John Graham, Anna Halprin) originally came from the direction of Mabel Todd (Ideokinesis). Also my teachers in modern and new dance, buto, ballet and placement (origins from Lulu Sweigard) gave us many ideas and images about being wide or hanging from heaven , being grounded or even projecting like laser beams into the center of the earth.

But when I began to teach, I had to realize that pictures are often not helping because the people of our culture are not centered in their body. Human beings are sometimes so far away from their proprioception and from their body sensations and especially not used to sense themselves with the kinaesthetic apparatus.

1) So I had first to introduce exercises of kinesthetically sensing before I could offer pictures.

In my opinion this movement-sensing -system consists of many areas: vestibular system, all nerves and the brain cells for leading a movement and sensing the feedback of the movement, the receptors for sensing the weight, the nerve cells or tactile organs about pressure, stroke, different qualities of touch on the surface and within the body. Of course those nerves are situated in the muscles, and especially around the joints and at the transitions from muscles to bones. For normal people but also for dancers to get a picture about the structure, function and the moving of that whole system is not easy in our culture, where we think and press buttons more often than we move. There are little girls who begin to take ballet classes although their movement development is not completed or already disturbed. So for me it became more and more clear, that I had to first give lessons about movement awareness and only after those let my dancers work with pictures, energy, placement. Therefore Feldenkrais-Method® is the indicated way to be combined with dance, especially ballet, but not only for the traditional class on barre, in center..., also for a very update teaching about alignment, placement and energetic/dynamic flow.

2) Example: We often need exercises in kinaesthetically sensing our sitbones or our shoulder blades and sensing their movements in relation to areas near them . Only than the students of dance and ballet can take advantage from imaginations like: see your pelvis like an umbrella or let your shoulder blades glide into your arms or let sand dropping straight

from your head into the center of the earth. Further visualizations can be: a water spout for the spine in pirouette and olive oil for the hip joint in développ  . The dancers themselves will and should find their own visualizations.

My experience is that the dancers understand the imaginations better when they have developed a clearer body image of their skeleton and the relations between joint movements. It is very effective for the learning - sometimes relearning- process to put the imaginations and the kinesthetic sensitivity together . Maybe that is like the movement development when the baby learns and uses all its senses.

The sequence within one lesson can begin with little Feldenkrais-impulses; then I go forward to pictures and towards energy work. I can also begin with imaginations or energywork or even the barre. Inbetween when kinaesthetic awareness is needed then I teach a special function. For example if the awareness of the placement of the feet is not there I can bring in a lesson how the feet are touching and rolling down to the floor while the dancer is lying on the back, feet standing, and moves one foot up and down.

Often I am creating the sequences and the necessary additions at the given moment, for any class anew. So the sequences can also be: barre - kinaesthetic lesson - energyflow- again barre or 3) - 2) - 1) (energywork- imaginations- kinaesthetic work ) and so on.

Sometimes I am even giving tasks of improvisation for special technique problems; they do both supporting the image and sensation in an easier way for goals like jumps or turns and they integrate what one has learned , above all if the movement patterns are very new and replacing ( damaging ) habits.

3) The energywork has its sources from the ancient bodyschools from Asia like Shiatsu, Yoga, concepts about meridians, chacras, advices about breathing...The exercises come either from ballet positions or yoga poses . What is emphasized is the flow of energy like breath or a river through the center line, the spine, through the arms, the legs. The basic ideas are to open the joints or any spots which tend to close (overtension) and to widen and elongate from the center out towards the environmental space. It is obviously that this is very good for health and expression in dance. For ballet particularly it helps to spread out very far away ; it supports the balance and the strength. The dancers can use this energyflow instead of only working hard with muscular power.

It is the task of the teacher to built up a good sequence in every class, to observe every dancer how she can take the advices and

exercises and , if necessary, to create new exercises or pictures and use different words .Sometimes even hands on or partner work including touching are incorporated. The ballet dancers first might be frustrated because this work is uncommon, very precise, sometimes slow. But later, when they experience the success they love it. EXAMPLES OF LESSONS:

Å FOR BATTEMENTS: ON BACK, LIFTING BOTH KNEES/LEGS BENT-OBSERVING

PELVIS; CHOOSING BETWEEN DIFF OPTIONS: KEEPING PELVIS PARALLEL TO FLOOR

B FOR CAMBRÉ: BACK, LEFT FOOT AND LEFT HAND STANDING- PUSHING EITHER WITH FOOT OR WITH HAND - COMPARE- ONLY PUSHING WITH HAND AND

LETTING FLOW THIS IMPULS UNTIL FOOT

ALSO: ON BELLY: LIFTING HEAD AND LIFTING KNEES/LEGS

VERY TINY DIFFERENCES! SENSING DIFFERENCES AND FLOW

and compare: doing all this together with the idea of elongating or energyflow

what to do if any support from the view of the body has no success?

go and process the error, the habit or the difficulty with the method of Dr. Arnold Mindells Processoriented Psychology

i.e. you amplify the fault, you experiment with what happens against the purpose of the dancer and you look for the message.

use this message in dance or everyday life before you try again

Feldenkrais and IdeoKinaesthetic.energymovement.placement (C)

Literature:

- see everything under Dr. Moshé Feldenkrais

- all my notes

- „Rätsel-Meniscus“ - theory and praxis how to heal the meniscus - from Eva Weißmann (in german language)

- see everything under Dr. Arny Mindell and Dr. Amy Mindell