

Introduction

The ballet technique classroom is a place where you learn to develop bodily skills needed to perform balletic movement well. It is also a place where you realize your expressive potential as an artist. Development of your technique skills (strength, elasticity, coordination) is just as important as the development of your expressive skills (artistry, musicality, personal interpretation of the vocabulary).

Strengthening your movement skills during ballet technique class teaches you how to perform with precision and clarity, which in turn, enhances your artistic potential. Conversely, developing the ability to express yourself artistically during ballet technique class teaches you how to uniquely perform and interpret the balletic vocabulary. This enhances your technical skills and knowledge of the balletic style. This book therefore emphasizes both technique and artistry, and challenges you to ask:

- How do I develop deeper sensory and body awareness?*
- What do I sense, feel, and think about as I perform balletic movement?*
- How do I experiment and improvise with the balletic vocabulary in class?*
- How do I develop expressively and artistically?*

Collectively, the 16 chapters in this manual provide you with the information needed to:

- *Develop greater body awareness and movement intention.* Identify your movement capacities and challenges, learn about the body, and improve your technical skills.
- *Move with intent.* Practice experimenting and improvising with different movement choices in technique class, and acquire new strategies for assessing and improving your technique.
- *Move expressively and fully.* Dance with dynamic variety, perform with feeling and emotion, interpret exercises in personal ways, and reflect on the expressive content of movement.
- *Deepen your movement literacy.* Apply movement concepts from Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis to your dance technique and deepen your

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understanding of fundamental movement concepts relevant to all movement, including ballet.

Dancing, of course! But, writing and speaking?

This book presents numerous movements concepts relevant to ballet technique, and includes a number of activities to help you apply the concepts to your dancing. This will give you new strategies and tools for answering the following questions:

- *Why do I perform certain exercises and movements in ballet class?*
- *What strategies or methods do I use inside and outside of class to develop my understanding of class exercises and concepts?*
- *How do I experiment or “play” with balletic movements in different ways?*

Reflective questions, such as these, are included in every chapter of this book. The questions can be answered in numerous ways, so write about them repeatedly and record your thoughts in an ongoing dance technique journal. The act of writing confirms your knowledge and helps make tangible your thoughts and ideas. *Why is that important?*

One of the primary ways you demonstrate your understanding of dance technique is through your dancing. Using additional methods, such as writing and speaking, will serve to deepen that understanding. Writing daily in your journal helps you remember how you explored the movement concepts from this book and how you applied your teacher’s feedback to your dancing.

Sometimes, however, it is easier to talk about your thoughts out loud. As a dance teacher, I develop my technical and artistic skills every time I explain and demonstrate movement concepts to my students. My students experience similar benefits when they practice communicating their knowledge of ballet technique to their peers. There are many ways to accomplish this:

- Discuss technique concepts with your peers.
- Review technique exercises with other dancers.
- Work with another dancer on a technique concept or exercise that is difficult for you.
- Practice giving your peers affirmations. Tell them what you appreciate about their dancing and be specific about it! Get started by using the following prompts:

I appreciated how you _____. This enhanced your performance because _____.

This moment in the exercise grabbed my attention because _____.

This movement was technically strong. I really noticed how you _____.

Assessing yourself productively

The contemporary dance environment requires you to be familiar with numerous dance styles and to work with different choreographers. This is why notions of “right” and “wrong” and “good” and “bad” are counterproductive in your training. What is deemed “good” in the ballet classroom may not be “good” in a different technique form, such as modern dance, tap, hip-hop, or African Dance styles, for example. Similarly, what is deemed “right” for one choreographer may change drastically when working with a different choreographer. There are, of course, stylistically preferred ways to execute ballet technique, but those stylistic preferences are just one of many choices you can make in your body when dancing.

Assessing your technique in ways that promote further understanding and new challenges will help you continue to sharpen your technical and artistic skills. But, it is important to do this productively. So pay attention to the language you use when coaching yourself. For example, instead of saying, “*This is the right position for my pelvis when I perform the relevé sous-sus,*” use one of the following options:

- *What happens when I move my pelvis into a different position (tipping forward or tucking under) during the relevé sous-sus? How does that feel different?*
- *How do different positions of the pelvis affect my placement differently?*
- *What if I experiment with the many ways my pelvis moves and identify when I use those movements in ballet and other dance styles?*

Exploring inquiry-based questions, such as these, expand your body awareness and understanding of movement. This type of exploration helps you practice three characteristics important at the advanced technique level: experimentation, problem solving, and risk-taking. Continually challenge yourself to attempt steps and sequences that are difficult for you, experiment with new movement concepts, and challenge your habitual movement patterns by asking questions that begin with the following prompts:

“*What if ...*” and “*What happens when ...*”

Routledge