

APPLICATION OF MENTAL PRACTICES OF THE FRANKLIN METHOD IN DANCE EDUCATION

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“The tiger must first be killed in thought – the rest is just a formality.”
(Confucius)

Abstract

Cognitive psychology, motion sciences and sport psychology widely accept the approach that technologies based on the intended use of mental representations significantly contribute to the development of sensory and motor functions. The method of Franklin also confirms that internal imaging and coordination capabilities correlate. In the anatomy of dance and the development of dance skills, visualization forms a bridge. Based on Jacobson's neuromuscular theory and Annett's ALI model, the image created in the brain impacts the activity of the muscles without performing the movement. Visualization helps to create future movements. The dancer learns his/her motion more deeply from multiple aspects. Throughout imagination, we use several modalities to create the internal image. Due to this process, it will be more effective to implement the movement sequence. This methodological overview contains a detailed theoretical and practical presentation of Franklin's technique. The use of creative children's dance may be advantageous for preparing visualization techniques. The authors recommend the dance pedagogical application of these tools at all ages.

Keywords: visualization, imagination, Franklin method, dance education

1. INTRODUCTION

Franklin writes in the preface of his book *Conditioning for dance* (2004) that the dynamic development of the posture has numerous advantages. A better posture increases the body efficiency and reduces bondage on a mental and physical level. The clearer the picture of our anatomical and biomechanical structure appears in our minds, the more dynamic our coordination and body awareness develops. We constantly keep discovering new connections between the body and mind that

can help us find new and practical solutions to the difficulties associated with each movement. This relationship is presented in detail by van der Kolk's book, *The body keeps the score* (2020). In one's life, sensory perception is decisive from perinatal age. The author deduces the possible causes of disturbances in the body's functioning as a sensory system. He emphasises the role of the body in trauma research and suggests body-oriented therapies to solve them. The book can be recommended literature for all dance teachers and dance artists.

Correctly visualized anatomical knowledge and adequately imagined bodily sensations assist for better biomechanical power and energy transmission both in the joints, connective tissues and muscles reducing the chances of injury (Franklin, 1996). Even nutrition supply can be influenced by increased flexibility, and reduced tension helps circulation. Besides it is the perfect way to relax and recover after difficult physical work (Maddison Prapavessis, Clatworthy, Hall, Foley, Harper, Cupal & Brewer, 2012). Several studies have examined the relationship between creating internal images and performing dance movements (Nordin & Cummin, 2007, Maddison et al., 2012). Nordin and Cummin (2007) observed that professional contemporary dancers and ballet dancers use complex images more often than amateur or hobby dancers, which improves their performance.

The authors' goal is to show the possibilities of Franklin's method in dance education, both in the case of conventional and individual dance forms.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

According to Bernáth, Krisztián and Séra (2018), the general mental ability to create and recreate experience is called *imagination*, the conscious control of which is *visualization*. Many components of the imagination are also used in visualization. We can recall images from recently perceived external stimuli, and from our memory, we can describe them verbally and transform them further (Bernáth et al., 2018). *Mental practice* and *imagination* phrases are often used as synonyms than a type of mental activity. However, Suinn enhances that *mental practice* is merely a form of imagination (Suinn, 1986, ref. Hanrahan & Vergeer, 2001). Hanrahan and Vergeer (2001) have studied the mental imagination strategies of modern dancers, during the training, the creation and the choreography's rehearsal, and before, during and after the exercises. Dancers worked with multi-dimensional and multi-modal imaginative images, which created a state of body, mind and mental well-being state during the rehearsals and for their whole lifestyle. Personal imaginative images have similar properties and can be classified into eight categories: inspiration, atmospheric, specific movement, metaphysical, emptying out, filling up, projection, and imagery rehearsal (Hanharan & Vergeer, 2011).

Visualization is a general psychological concept that means constructing and imagining pictures. This process can be controlled consciously but is often activated against our will (Maddison et al., 2012). Each person can discover the phenomenon; its basis is the visual memory. It is possible to establish a direct connection with sensory memories: what the imagined picture looked like, what its voice, sensation or other sensory characteristics were (Bower, 1972). Our brain's right hemisphere performs processing visual stimuli; its logic is independent of space and time. This

part of the brain stores the relationship systems based on similarities analogies. Bodily reactions are also generated by the right hemisphere, responding immediately to specific, visual stimuli. An example of such a bodily reaction is to imagine our steps in the soft beach sand while walking. We coordinate and articulate our feet and soles differently, even though we have only come into contact with the sand on a mental level. It means that the thoughts form a kind of control over the body, which can be influenced by mediating images during an autosuggestion process (Bagdy, 2013).

Imagination is built on visualization, which is considered the primary method of sports psychology. We take an external image as a basis during imagination and try to make it internal (Bagdy, 2013). Different modalities are involved in this process: visual, acoustic, olfactory and kinaesthetic. The richer the created internal image modality is, the more effective the technique.

The brain plays an essential role in developing of the technical readiness of the dance artist. The idea of moving faster or lifting the legs higher is part of self-improvement, the thinking of the dancer, just like understanding primary muscle work. According to the *functional equivalence hypothesis*, imagination is functionally equivalent to the physical object or event being mapped (Finke, 1979), which forms the basis of mental practice (Bernáth et al., 2018). This is supported by Jacobson's early psychoneuromuscular theory (1930) that states the EMG (electromyography) reaction samples of the muscle activity are the same during the actual and imagined muscular work. However, the imaginary muscle work activity is lower; feedback to the brain also occurs at this time. Therefore, a similar activity occurs in the nervous system, whether it is a movement imagined or created (Vealey & Greenleaf, 2001).

The ALI model (Annett, 1996) (action-language-imagination) is similarly separated by motor and verbal channels in cognitive operation that encode movement and speech. The connection between the two channels is the imagination (Annett, 1996, ref. Hall, 2001). Based on this logic, techniques related to mental imagery can help the dancer learn more deeply and in more aspects about their movements (Nordin & Cummin, 2007). It is like the mind's eye: a mental process that resembles an authentic experience without experience (Smith, 1990).

3. THE FRANKLIN METHOD

The teacher or choreographer can use visualization or imagination to trigger reactions from the student or inspire him/her to perform certain movements, deepen and make dancers aware of the information acquired.

Supporting a movement with an imaginary picture can add variety to the movement. The different performances will occur during the execution of the two instructions:

1. instruction: "Walk slowly, gently."
2. instruction: "Walk slowly, gently and imagine yourself walking on eggshells."

Visualization is practically a catalyst for creative movement, helping to expand the sensations and interpretations associated with movement developing and stimulating movement repertoire. Franklin uses visualization techniques in several areas of dance instruction. These include balance, flexibility, correct posture,

strengthening the core, strengthening the feet and legs, strengthening the arms and upper body, as well as rotations and jumps.

Franklin coined the term "core visualization" in this context, referring to initial images teachers can give to students to develop their intuitive image system as the training progresses. To work effectively, a dancer needs a core image. A good example is the initial image used when practising leg extension.

"Imagine the pelvic area on the side performing the movement as a backwards spinning wheel that lifts the legs. Then the top head of the femur resting in the socket." (Franklin, 2004, p. 96)

A teacher who has many pictures at hand can more easily describe each movement, so students with less experience can be expected to understand them more easily. It is important to remember that each person is unique and has varying abilities to capture and create imaginary pictures. The imaging process also depends on how the brain receives, interprets and sends images. Nevertheless, most people can evoke real and imagined pictures through the experience of sight, hearing, smell, touch and movement, but of course, these skills can be developed (Short, Afremov & Overby, 2001).

The same process is called *layering* by Nordin and Cummin (2007): starting from a primary image, which is extended with other features during mental practice (e.g., assigning emotions to an image).

Franklin found that these images helped release barriers and lengthened muscles in the sensation domain. Sometimes, he also helps visualize by touching the hip joint, emphasizing the image associated with pelvic movement. In some cases, he places his palm on the sacrum to prevent the pelvis from retracting. Once the dancer becomes regular in using the image mentioned above to lift the extended leg, these core images fade away, and a separate imaginative system shaped by subjective associations begins to emerge (Franklin, 2004).

Visualization sets the stage for the process of imagination, in which multiple modalities are involved in the formation of internal images. They are not necessarily limited to images alone, but can also be linked to hearing, smell, taste or muscle sensation, making imagination a potent tool for improving the quality of movement sequences (Bernáth et al., 2018). Eventually, someone who moves by imagining his/her body as seaweed will move in a different way than one who visualizes himself/herself floating in the water. In this case not only the seaweed is visualized but during the process also the tactile and movement elements of the seaweed drifted by the water are used.

Several studies have attempted to define what visualization is (Nordin & Cummin, 2007; Bernáth et al., 2018). Franklin (1996) divides sensory visualization into seven subgroups: visual, kinaesthetic, tactile, proprioceptive, olfactory, auditory, and gustatory. From this list, it is clear that Franklin conflates these two overlapping concepts while the sports psychology literature distinguishes between visualization and imagination techniques. In the present study, the authors propose to use the terms visualization technique and mental training as a collective term for the techniques of visualization and imagination in the case of Franklin's technique.

Franklin (2004) also reports that when teaching, he often asks his students to describe their experiences when using a particular image. The starting point for this change is when the image already includes the dancer himself. Franklin then works with the dancer to develop the image, giving ideas for initiating or formulating movement or a new way of observing anatomy. At times, he also touches them so that the dancer can experience a different perception. Then he asks again what experience he has had so that most of the time, the image the dancer uses becomes more subjective by the end of the process. The resulting image helps the dancer confirm the new, improved movement pattern (Franklin, 2004).

Visualization techniques help the dancer to develop the most authentic inner images. Over time, the dancer can become his or her own trainer, creating of imagery, automatically emerging when needed. This ability is a massive advantage for a professional dancer, who often goes long periods without external help to develop his technique. Intuitive imagery is a dialogue with the dancer's own body. This heightened attention to the body helps artists experience their constant physical gifts and change physical and emotional states more fully. An intelligent support system is thus born, making a wide range of movements available to them. In this way, we can utilize the complete inner resources of the body (Franklin, 2004).

Next section, we will show the practical application of this technique, without claiming to be exhaustive, by illustrating typical visualization techniques used to develop a single weight with practical examples.

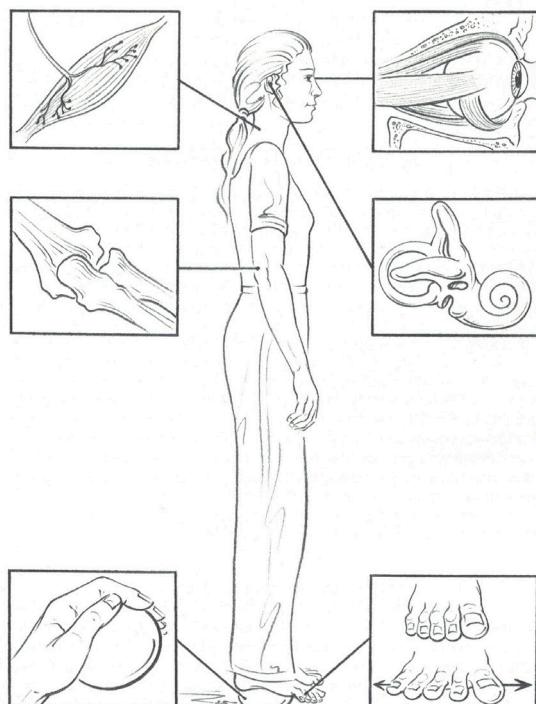
3.1. Balance

Balance is one of the essential skills for a dancer, yet many struggle with it. According to some theories (Franklin 2004), our eighth sense is the vestibular system, responsible for the balance. When posture has the right centre, bones are in the proper alignment and muscles are coordinated, less muscle work is needed to maintain a given position. Conversely, if the posture is incorrect, correctly functioning balance is more effort for the body. To improve balance, you need to pay attention to what you are doing while you are balancing. For example, if we are trying to perform a *relevé* in an attitude and keep falling, we are likely to use our body in parts rather than as a coordinated whole. We must first perform a *plié* with the supporting leg to go from an entire leg up to a *demi-pointe* or *pointe*. If the right shoulder is more engaged than the left, the spine will twist, causing tension to build up in parts of the body to compensate for the imbalance in the legs. This tension created during *relevé* makes it challenging to feel the upward movement of your body. One side of us moves faster than the other, again requiring compensation to maintain balance. However, compensation is complex and more complicated than working with the whole body. In addition, when we are out of balance, we already start to worry about what we have done wrong, thus starting a series of negative thoughts (Franklin, 2004).

From this description, it is clear that Franklin sees observation and the analysis of our bodily reactions as a central factor. Whether we are in whole or in a relevant balance position, the geometric centre of our pelvic floor is below the top of our head. Therefore, during the *plié*, it is advisable to maintain the relationship outlined above,

i.e. to bring our axis one centimetre forward above the supporting leg so that the force of gravity assists our efforts and prevents tipping. This process is primarily unconscious, which needs to be made conscious, as a basic rule of Franklin's method is not to rely on automatisms and ingrained beliefs when practising. Analytical thinking requires a degree of awareness and concentration that significantly facilitates the abandonment of practising according to preconceptions. It is also complicated because, for example, if we get into the habit of holding our head in the wrong place, our body perception adapts to it so that the nervous system will not send us constant information that we are not in a balanced position. When a teacher corrects this posture, the correct posture may seem uncomfortable at first because we are already used to the incorrect one. We do not perceive the corrected posture as correct until our senses adapt to it.

We should mention the ongoing reflexes, which are automatisms from a very early stage of life. Corrective reflexes use gravity to align the head with the spine or the whole body. These reflexes orient us in the direction of our centre, which allows us to know where we can assess where we are compared to our axis so we can respond effectively to incoming stimuli. These reflexes are coordinated by the sense organs in the neck muscles, inner ear and eyes. Danvers need to train the neck and inner ear mechanisms, so visualization exercises dealing with equilibrium mainly focus on these (Franklin, 2004).



*Figure 1. Sensory mechanisms used by the body to achieve balance
(Franklin, 2004, p. 31)*

One of the visualizations used to maintain correct, effortless balance focuses on the spine line. Here again, anatomical knowledge and the ability to visualize based on this knowledge is important for the dancer to visualize the skeletal system. The spine can be divided into two S-shaped sections, the upper part of which is the *thoracic section*, an inverted S, from the bottom of the skull to the bottom of the upper spinal section. The other is the *lumbar section*, the sacrum and the coccyx (*Figure 2*). It is this formation that gives the spine its flexibility and load-bearing capacity. To feel our centre in the correct posture, the lines of the spine must balance each other. If one 'curve' is excessive or very flat, the other spinal segments suffer the consequences. Balancing becomes effortless when the S lines of the spine are in harmony (Franklin, 2004).



Figure 2.
The S lines of
the spine
(Franklin, 2004)

1. Imagine the double S shape of the spine. At the neck, the spine curves gently forward, and the upper back curves backwards, while the lumbar section curves forward, the sacrum curves backwards and the coccyx curves forward.
2. Imagine these spinal segments standing on top of each other, in balance. Feel them to find their optimal depth and length.
3. Imagine the spine as a harmonic wave and observe the continuous flow up and down. Above the cervical spine, the imagined spine section bends forward, as does the imagined spine continuation below the coccyx.
4. During the *plié*, imagine these spinal curves deepening slightly as you bend your knees. Imagine the movement of the spine, the bumps on the back of the bones as they rise. As the *plié* moves up, imagine the spinal segments lengthening. Support this process by allowing the spine to grow upwards. The spine lines are in constant dynamic change, responding to the movement of the limbs.
5. Observe how it feels to work with such a balanced, dynamic spine. (Franklin, 2004, p. 43)

These examples highlight how Franklin relies on imagination, knowledge of anatomy and analytical thinking when realizing a movement. Yet, his toolkit is much more complex: he often uses aids such as balls for balancing or flexible ropes (*thera band*) for almost each exercise. As illustrated by the ball in the *Figure 1*, these aids stimulate the necessary muscles.

4. SUMMARY

Visualization techniques are catalysts for creative movement and can be used as inspiration tools based on the eight categories created by Hanrahan and Vergeer (2001). In dance education, we guide students to the processes of imagination by applying mental images, with metaphorical instructions: "Dance like a newspaper in the wind!". Visualization tools can be used to develop spatial orientation: "Dance in an imaginary icosahedron!" We can transfer technical solutions: "Make a jeté

like you are sweeping a leaf with your foot away!”. In addition, we can formulate instructions more easily: “Stretch as if you wanted to reach an apple on a tree!”. The dancer can be inspired to shape specific movements with the help of mental practice. Visualization techniques can develop and correct in aesthetics the implemented motioned tasks with the help of imagery pictures (Moran, Guillot, MacIntyre & Collet, 2012).

Fantasy, awareness and perseverance are prerequisites for the effective use of the Franklin method, which is to be developed by the age of 6 to 10 years. Franklin’s method can be acquired as an adult by using the layering and the conscious application of mental practice. With the persistent and consistent application of the method, we can achieve severe results in visualization and the field of motion combinations. Not only the execution of the movement can be enhanced, but after injury, the quality of regeneration can also be improved (Maddison et al., 2012). According to Vealey and Greenleaf’s results, the mental and physical practice also improved performance and learning processes when involving all the senses of the athletes studied.

When we first get to exercise, we should not bother about image display quality. After all, the technique will show progress, so we will protect ourselves from the spiral of negative thoughts and will not be distracted from the task. If possible, it is worth starting mental practise at preschool age (3–6 years), first of all with the help of *creative children’s dance*. Task-related creative children’s dance also develops internal image-making skills similar to listening to fairy tales. The creative children’s dance eliminates the dichotomy between the body and the mind while developing the internal imaging skill and continuously evolves the multimodality of children. The integrated knowledge gained in this way is especially effective; the experiences can be anchored as physical and spiritual observations.

Finally, we hope that our methodological summary successfully promotes the application of Franklin’s visualization method in dance pedagogical practice. Teachers who want to maximize students’ creative abilities, will benefit from these techniques.

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