

A central illustration of a ballerina in a purple leotard is the focal point. She is captured in a dynamic pose, with her right leg raised and bent at the knee, and her left leg extended downwards. Her hair is styled in a bun, and she has a serene expression. The background is a vibrant blue with a watercolor-like texture. Overlaid on the illustration is the title 'Coordination.' in a large, elegant, black cursive font. Below the main title, the words 'FOR BALLET' are written in a white, sans-serif font inside a black rectangular box.

Coordination.

FOR BALLET



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THE TEACHER MUST DECIDE

The Ballet Source series of manuals provides information, activities and suggestions for the teaching of ballet to children. The materials in these books have worked well for the author, and for other teachers of her acquaintance. However, the author cannot know what approach or which physical activities will be appropriate

and safe for any particular teacher, class, or student. It is the responsibility of each ballet teacher to use his or her best judgment in applying the information and teaching suggestions contained herein, and in using the activities, dances and teaching materials contained in this book and others in The Ballet Source series.

Welcome to Coordination for Ballet

THIS BOOK IS INTENDED FOR USE WITH STUDENTS AGE SEVEN AND OLDER.

For suggestions about what to use with younger students, consult the teaching manuals from The Ballet Source, Levels 1, 2, and 3.

Coordination is a natural development that should be allowed to happen on its own, whenever possible. This will usually occur when the young child is free to move through the natural movement patterns intended by nature. (See pages 8 and 9). These movements also need to be purposeful, or intended, by the child to happen, or to result in something the child wants to do. (See page 10)

This book provides the dance teacher with suggestions for natural and purposeful movement activities that can be included in a ballet class. These activities should help students improve their coordination, and also be a fun break from the technique of ballet. Use them about midway through the class.

Coordination is programmed by nature to be a natural part of every person's physical development. It will nearly always develop on its own when given sufficient unpressured opportunity to do so.

Today's children are not as physically active as in previous generations, especially in informal play settings, such as singing games, folk dances, and other traditional play activities, such as "London Bridge", "Tag", "Hide and Seek", "Farmer in the Dell", etc.

When a dance student seems to be behind in coordination, correction on how to move, such as teaching them to skip, will not help very much. Forcing a particular coordination skill may actually prevent the overall improvement that you really want to happen.

All students need to strengthen and improve their physical coordination to some degree. They need to strengthen and practice the basic natural movement experiences because these are what forms the base for ballet technique.

Study pages 5-9 before using the activities and dances. Select the ones you feel will be fun for the class to do. If you think they are fun, and convey this feeling to the class, they will most likely enjoy doing them!

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PURCHASE COORDINATION FOR BALLET

Introduction to Coordination For Ballet

DISCLAIMER:

When the dancer is not responding to the activity or exercise in the way that you would normally expect them to, they may need a medical expert to check for possible structural or neurological difficulties. When the dance exercises don't produce the expected results, consider suggesting a clinical evaluation by those that know more.

PURPOSE OF THIS MANUAL

The activities suggested are intended to help students age eight¹ and older to improve their coordination, as needed for ballet.

These activities are not therapeutic. Dance teachers are not medically trained, and do not offer therapy in any form.

The good news is that the ballet teacher can select dance activities for class that should improve the students' coordination for ballet.

Teachers should pay attention to the Teaching Notes preceding the exercises. These are to help you know the general intent of the activity, and to help you present it successfully.

Each teacher is different, just as each class and student is different from all others. Adjust the work and the suggestions to blend with your own personal style of teaching, yet not losing the intent and effectiveness of the work.

¹For help with younger ages, we recommend the Ballet Arts For Young Children and Classical Ballet manuals from The Ballet Source.

WHAT IS NEEDED FOR BALLET?

The complex and advanced coordination patterns used in classical ballet require:

- a strong, secure foundation of natural coordination,
- kinesthetic awareness, both of self and of the world around that self, and
- an ability to learn which muscles to signal for the various positions and movements in classical ballet.

That's a big order. The miracle is that so many students actually succeed in learning so much of this very demanding art form!

GUIDELINES FOR USING THIS MANUAL

- 1. Use what the students enjoy doing.**
Create your own versions of the activities if this works better.
- 2. Watch for noticeable improvement in about 12 weeks.** Movement habits seldom change much in less time.
- 3. If they cannot learn or respond to an activity after two weeks, drop it.** Try something more basic, something that will lead up to the result you are after.
- 4. Don't call attention to a student's shortcomings—** they already know they are "uncoordinated", and may have deep feelings about it.
- 5. Teach safely.** For injury prevention , and best motor skill improvement:

If it hurts, don't do it. "Hurt" means pain, not the gentle stretchy feeling that is sometimes felt with dance movements. Dance is hard work, but it should also be comfortable and fun.

- 6. Teach with a positive approach.** Praise, encourage, compliment the class. Avoid giving special attention to individuals unless you give it to each member of the class. Teach the class as a unit, even though each student has a different set of abilities.
- 7. The parents' attitudes affect a student's view of their abilities.** Assure parents that dance lessons usually do help, but it will take time. Coordination problems, especially in a dance class, are normal, and do not indicate that anything is wrong.
- 8. Coordination activities added to the ballet classwork will strengthen the coordination of every student.** The entire class will benefit. The class can do these activities as warmups, or as fun breaks from technique, partway through the class.
- 9. Keep it simple.** Tough challenges do not help. Contrary to popular opinion, a tough challenge only makes the problem worse.
- 10. This book contains a sampling of dance activities that can help dance students improve their coordination as it relates to ballet and other dance forms.**

Coordination—Where Does It Come From?

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF A STUDENT IS “UNCOORDINATED”?

Most people, when asked to explain coordination, refer to the use of arms in opposition when walking, running, marching. They may also mention not running into things, having one’s movements under control, not looking clumsy, etc.

This manual will assume that normal coordination is actually present in every person. Those who appear uncoordinated simply lack movement experience, or their coordination has not been used enough to become secure and observable in some movement situations. For example, imagine a person knowing how to drive a car, but who doesn’t practice it enough to pass the driving test!

As dance teachers, we want this unused coordination to become an observable part of the student’s outward behavior.

It is hard to be patient with this process. We want our classes to look good. We want students to learn the material, and to look like they have learned it. Not only that, our artistic sense that knows how the finished dance product should look, wants it to happen now!

As dance teachers, we are also dancers, performers, artists. Any awkwardness or lack of observable coordination grates on our sense of artistry like an unresolved musical discord.

There is no “magic bullet”, no one exercise that will solve all coordination problems for all students, within just a few lessons. But, the good news is that we can make a difference!

COORDINATION IS DEVELOPMENTAL

Each stage of development is built on the foundation of all of the previous stages.

All of the stages overlap. It is an extremely complex process that is programmed by nature into each and every one of us.

When a new stage of development starts, all of the previous stages must be reinforced and strengthened at the same time the new stage is being learned.

As adults, we have the potential for all of the basic patterns of coordination within us. All stages of development are constantly being used as is appropriate to the situation, and they are continually being strengthened by this use.

LEARNING BALLET IS DEVELOPMENTAL

It, too, is a very complex process! Ballet also requires that previous learnings be reinforced and strengthened whenever a new skill is learned.

Example: Before building a house, you make a plan. A house begins with a foundation. A certain strength in the foundation is needed in order to support a one story house.

Later, if you wish to build a second story on top of that same house, you have to strengthen the foundation so it will not collapse from the extra weight. And, you must also extend and refine the connections involved: electrical, plumbing, heating, etc.

That's exactly what we do in the teaching of ballet. In teaching the grand battement, we do not stop doing the battement tendu, and the battement degagé or glissé. The underlying, smaller movements must continue to be strengthened and refined in order to support the new skill of the grand battement.

Strong grand battements lay the groundwork for beautiful grand jetés. All of the movement skills in ballet are connected to each other. The advanced skills are dependent upon a strong foundation of basic skills.

These basics are never discarded.

They are continually being refined and strengthened for as long as the dancer dances.

Providing for the child, teen, or adult to improve their coordination is no different from providing for them to learn the skills needed for good ballet.

The process is the same; the material may differ according to need, but the process is the same, and the two learnings can and should happen side by side.

WHAT IS COORDINATION?

Movement coordination is the observable result of motor skill development. Motor skill development is the observable result of purposeful movement experiences.

Purposeful movement is not accidental or random, but has been “planned” mentally by the person, to accomplish a movement and a result that the person wants to happen.

HOW DOES COORDINATION HAPPEN?

“Coordination” or “Motor Skill Development” is programmed into the human body. It is programmed to happen without instruction. It will happen if enough of the appropriate natural movement experiences are available all during the growing years, most particularly from birth to age 8.

When coordination has not fully developed in an older student, it can usually be remedied by providing some of the movement experiences that would have promoted its development in early childhood.

Coordination is simply “teamwork”

between the muscles involved in a movement, and the conscious thoughts of the individual. This is true whether the movement is familiar, or new.

Certain patterns of movement that are repeatedly used become habits that no longer need detailed instructions from the brain, but are stored as complete units in the motor area of the brain, and can be set in motion by a single intent from the person's conscious brain.

Riding a bicycle is a standard example of using movement patterns that are learned, and which operate as habits or learned reflexes.

This teamwork develops in sequential stages, each new level building on the foundation of all previous levels. Weakness at any level can cause a weakness throughout the entire system.

Coordination begins when the infant first discovers that he or she can use the hand as a tool to reach, touch, take hold of something.

IT CAN BE A LIFETIME OF LEARNING!

Coordination never stops improving. Recent research has finally admitted that the brain never stops learning and improving. Since motor skill development involves teamwork with the brain, it follows that our coordination can continue to improve throughout our life.

Another fairly recent finding is that movement is what stimulates brain activity, and brain development! Perhaps that is a part of why young children find movement to be so much fun!

RANDOM MOVEMENT IS WHERE WE BEGAN

A newborn's movements are mostly random, or without conscious purpose. During the first seven or eight years of life,

the brain is busy collecting and organizing information gathered by the body's sensory systems; and it is busy turning random movement into planned, purposeful movement.

When an older person allows some of their movements to be random, they appear uncoordinated.

"Trial and error" movement is OK in a new, unlearned skill, but it is not what we consider usual in skills that are used often, such as walking across a room and avoiding the furniture; or opening a door without running into it.

Trial and error are a part of the learning process, and need to not be corrected all of the time. This is how the brain adds movement planning to the random movement, and creates coordination patterns, and sequences of muscular action that work well with gravity.

The foundation for coordination is purposeful or planned movement.

In ballet class, mimes and pantomimes that are discussed, and details of the movements worked out either individually, or as a class, can help students to mentally direct their muscles. It will take time, probably a few weeks at least, for results to become apparent.

There is a Pyramid Of Coordination Within Us

There is a Pyramid of Coordination within each one of us. All stages of development overlap—ages listed may vary between individuals.

I. PURPOSEFUL MOVEMENT

Begins soon after birth. As a separate observable stage, it extends to about age two. It continues to build and strengthen throughout life.

This is movement planned and directed by the person's own thinking processes. This is the foundation of all coordination. As the person increases in ability, motor planning becomes a more and more important part of the total picture of coordination. An awareness of self begins here: one's size, shape, ability to move, ability to control and manipulate objects and to relate to persons in the immediate environment.

2. SYMMETRY

As an observable stage, symmetry extends from about age two to age seven. The Symmetrical Coordination Pattern emerges. Both sides of the body move in about the same way, either simultaneously, or in immediate reversal movements, such as walking. Balance with gravity is learned and refined; some aspects of posture begin; an awareness of one's place in space strengthens. With strengthening self-awareness comes the beginnings of self-confidence and self-esteem.

3. UNITY

As an observable stage, extends from about age three to age six. Unilateral Coordination Pattern develops and complements the symmetry already in place. This can be seen as the eyes look where the hand reaches, and when the same arm and leg work at the same time, as when both go forward at the same time in marching. An awareness of other persons and of interacting with them is strengthening.

4. CONTRAST

Usually begins to show up around age five to age seven; in some movements, it may appear much sooner.

Contralateral coordination pattern appears as a result of the three-layer foundation now in place. This is what most people expect to see. Arms move in opposition to legs in walking, running, marching. The three natural coordination patterns (stages #2, 3, and 4) overlap in their development, and reinforce each other. Some of the basic natural movements can be combined to form more difficult movements such as skipping.

Handedness, and a movement awareness of right and left come at this level. Forcing such responses sooner can be confusing to the child. The ability to fit movements to musical beats usually happens here. (Lack of muscular control prevented it before.) In

ballet class, we often err in assuming this pattern will naturally carry over to the dance movements. No, dance movements belong to levels #5 and #6.

5. COMPLEX OR COMBINED MOVEMENT SKILLS

About ages 8-11. Now precise movement training can be successful. This stage is rarely reached before age eight. Combined coordination patterns can be learned, but they must be taught and practiced. Natural coordination is in place, making technical learnings possible, but it won't happen automatically. The teaching must be there. And, students must also be given a "trial and error" time, a chance to work out the motor planning they need to make the learning secure. Let them perfect it on their own once they have the general idea of what to do.

6. SPECIALIZED MOVEMENT SKILLS

About ages 12-17. The person selects certain skills they want to be really good at. They will work hard to improve these skills. All they need is a positive teaching approach, and a chance to work out the details in their own neuromuscular system. Constant demonstration and cueing can prevent them from improving, as it takes away the need for them to precisely plan their own movements. Planning is not less important now. Its importance actually increases as each coordination level is added. Teachers need to not always dance with the class. Demonstrate, then let them work it out on their own!

Thank you!

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