

PHYSICALITY AT THE SNDO (School for New Dance Development in English)

How do we see physicality at the SNDO? What is our movement philosophy?

It is clear that physicality does not only refer to the body or the moving body but it also refers to the person or the moving person. At the SNDO dance cannot be seen separately from the dancer because we want to see WHO the dancer is at the same time as we want to understand WHY the dancer does what he does, or doesn't do.

The WHO and the WHY, then the HOW

At the SNDO we train our students to become makers, to think for themselves and to move for themselves. We want to be able to see the maker/person, WHO, in his work and what he has to say, WHY.

The HOW in the question of movement is very important in the school but should be according to and at service to the WHO and the WHY. The HOW should help the student to find his signature and so it comes down to discussing what classes, physical and other, should be offered to achieve such a signature.

In the case of dance technique: any given dance technique shapes the physical development and physical behavior or choice of movements of a student and therefore will influence the esthetic and artistic outcome, especially in a school with emphasis on technique. At the SNDO dance technique is taught to develop movement skills for the organization of the body but it is not taught as the artistic equation of dance, so far is clear. An SNDO student is supposed to find out for himself what dance is or can be and to redefine or reinvent dance for himself. If dance means a certain technique then there you have the answer already, the student can stop looking and just learn the technique. But if the artistic aim of the SNDO is NEW DANCE, then how else can there be new dance if not through freedom of the interpretation of the word dance? Through freedom from any dance technique, from any fixed form?

An already existing dance form has the characteristic that it is very clear, both in shape and in meaning, since the form has been agreed upon. In fact so clear that the dancer as the person that he is can hide behind both form and esthetics (f.e. in ballet).

But at the SNDO, if we want freedom from an already existing form for creative/artistic expression (WHO and WHY), then we have to be willing to step away from fixed form and create space for a more personal form to come about. Freedom from an existing form leaves the dancer bare.

He has only himself left to rely on to make his own, new form in movement, and to find his own meaning for what he does. With no fixed shape or meaning to rely on, this means the dancer himself is the source for his creation, in body and mind and spirit and everything that he is.

Consequently, the definition of dance at the SNDO:

DANCE IS WHO YOU ARE

If dance is who you are then classes in investigation and research of movement material should help a student to find out WHO he is in movement, so that he can move for himself, meaning, develop a clear and individual movement vocabulary that speaks for him and that helps shape his WHY of what he does artistically. A personal movement vocabulary is, amongst other things, the base for the student's artistic work at the school, and is ultimately his signature.

Making work at the SNDO is all about learning how to connect an idea/concept to the body or to movement, so a student should work on the integration of his thinking (concept, mind) and his physicality (body). For this he needs to have personal movement or idiosyncratic movement available to him, meaning he needs the ability to make clear choices in for him not only typical movement but also all possible movement. How to do that?

The HOW

A student's movement vocabulary becomes individual or idiosyncratic only when he integrates his personality with his dancing. And by personality I don't mean his ego since that is only one aspect of him.

The ego is a creation of the self, a fabricated self and more often than not an obstruction, it is not the real self or the whole self that includes the soul/essence of a person.

To integrate his personality and his dancing the student has to be willing to open up as a person, to go beyond his ego. The more he can do that the more personal and therefore unique his vocabulary will be, and the broader his work source.

To find this individuality a student has to tap into the source of himself, who he is.

He needs to reflect on himself. In order to reflect he needs awareness.

More specifically, Body-Mind Awareness. Because, not only does a student need an awareness of what is going on in the body and in movement at any given time on a sensory level. But, equally important, he also needs an awareness of how his mind works while moving, he needs to develop his own so-called outside-eye so that he 'sees', and not only feels, what he is doing in any moment. The student has to become aware of his own choice making for movements. Awareness is necessary for him to be able to recognize the unavoidable patterns or habits of movement that every dancer has, patterns that blur what he is trying to communicate (WHY) and that block the development of his vocabulary (WHO). Patterns and habits weaken the student's expressiveness, they make him unclear, and they are there to be broken and changed.

In order to break and change habits he needs awareness of his body AND of his mind.

Meaning, we need a holistic approach in teaching at the SNDO. The integration of body and mind means no boundary between the body and the mind.

Consequently, I think teaching AWARENESS is HOW to achieve the WHO and the WHY in dance.

But then, teaching awareness based on clear principles to work with.

So all the body practices and techniques that are taught in the school, like Meditation, Yoga, Alexander Technique, Movement Research as well as the Contemporary and Ballet techniques should all be based on clear principles to build awareness with, and should all be focused on integrating the body and the mind.

In a way that they can help the mind to see the body's potential for movement from a still position (Meditation), from different held positions (Yoga), or while thinking in activity/movement (AT, MR, Contemporary, Ballet).

What does ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE do?

AT is a practical method to detect and change bad habitual patterns in both body and mind, based on a very simple principle, the primary control:

an ideal relationship in movement between the neck, the head and the back.

It functions like a natural law, a universal given/principle, like gravity.

Working with the primary control informs a student about his body awareness, what his body is about, how he uses it and how he can use his body better, more efficiently and healthier, for physical improvement.

Additionally, since the AT is a holistic practice in the sense that it acknowledges a human being as a whole and not just as a body, it also helps to build a student's self awareness, awareness about WHO he is. Because habitual patterns on a mental, emotional, psychological and spiritual level (however conscious or unconscious these are) are connected to the patterns on the physical level, and so they automatically can break and change as well.

How can AT be a bridge to making work at the SNDO?

The pattern or habit itself is important but only relatively so, it should not have the main focus, since this, after clarifying the habit, only confirms the form of the habit and with that its stuckness.

This can easily bring about frustration in a student.

The moment of breaking a pattern/habit is the important moment and should have the main focus because that moment brings the liberation from something old and the possibility of something new, it is a moment of expansion in a person, a moment of inspiration, and is in fact the moment of CREATIVITY itself!

How it works: during an AT lesson a student is encouraged to use awareness or pay attention to what he is THINKING while MOVING and while STAYING PRESENT in the moment by watching the environment that he is in. Doing this strengthens the proprioceptive sense of the student, his sense of Self, himself in relation to the world around him. A stronger sense of self not only means a stronger presence and a bigger confidence but it also means a stronger or better connection to the student's being, his essence, which ultimately I believe is his creative source.

The moment of breaking a pattern/habit is like tearing something open that was closed or stuck, like creating a gap where essence and creativity can come through. To say it in other words, AT works on creating more space in the body as the blocks dissolve that keep the patterns in place. This goes along with creating more inner space.

In the holistic sense this means there is no separation between outside and inside, no boundary between subconscious and conscious. More inner space means more room for essence/being. This is in my experience what happens when working with AT, a student comes out more as the person that he is (WHO) while he is more in touch with his creativity (WHY).

It is generally said that AT can improve presentation and performance skills but I think what I describe above is what lies at its foundation.

But what is AWARENESS?

With the word awareness always come the words IN THE MOMENT or the word NOW. This is because they are intrinsically linked. To be more specific, real awareness can only come in THE MOMENT OF NOW, never in 5 minutes ago because that moment has gone, has become a memory, and there is nothing you can do about 5 minutes ago except for thinking about it and drawing a conclusion. Nor ever can awareness come in 5 minutes from now because that moment in the future hasn't come yet. Either conclusion/reflection (about 5 min. ago) or anticipation/preparation (of/for 5 min. from now) is not the same as awareness.

This very moment, now, is really the only moment there ever is and that makes it the most powerful moment at that. Not only because you can do something about it since it is the MOMENT OF CHOICE. But more so because it has everything in it, it is the very moment of CREATIVITY. It is so powerful that it can erase the past moment and set up the best possible condition for the future moment, depending on your choice.

This goes for life as well as for dance. It is the only moment for real change.

But back to dance:

a movement or action (or feeling or thought for that matter, but let's stick to dance) without awareness means the student identifies with that movement/action in that moment, and there is nothing he can do about it, there is no conscious choice. It means he is in a sensing mode or state and whatever he is doing is internal and does not communicate to the outside world. But when awareness comes in that means he can look at the movement/action at the same time because there is a little space between him and the movement/action (the above mentioned outside-eye), there is no identification and no judgment (yet), and now conscious choice is possible.

When awareness creates this little space it is in fact space for the student's essence, and why is that important? Because when a student is making work and looking for inspiration and creativity he cannot find all the answers in his mind alone or in his body alone, he cannot just think everything up or expect that the body does all the work for him, both thought and movement are form. Instead, or in addition, he has to let inspiration and creativity come to him, so he has to be able or willing to let go of what he knows and go to the unknown, to his essence, and essence is formless.

Essence is where the difference between body and mind is dissolved and where the student finds the ultimate WHY of his artistic work, in the formlessness.

We need both form (thought, movement) and formlessness (essence) because when we say making work is

really putting the body in space and time (also form) then we need essence and inspiration (formless) to create from/with.

Conclusion

Awareness, or alert perception in the moment, makes free choice possible, integrates body and mind, and so makes it possible to create, to change, develop, transform and communicate all at the same time.

Teaching Movement Research for me is a way of teaching awareness, through movement before or beyond fixed form, but nonetheless clear movement seeing that it is made as a result of a conscious choice.

So this movement has a personal signature or idiosyncrasy (WHO) and a reason (WHY) because it is connected to the dancer's being. Working this way makes it possible to do away with yet another boundary, the one

between performance and research or between the performer and the researcher since both require the same amount or level of awareness and clarity of execution.

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