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The Value Of Imagery In Creative Dance

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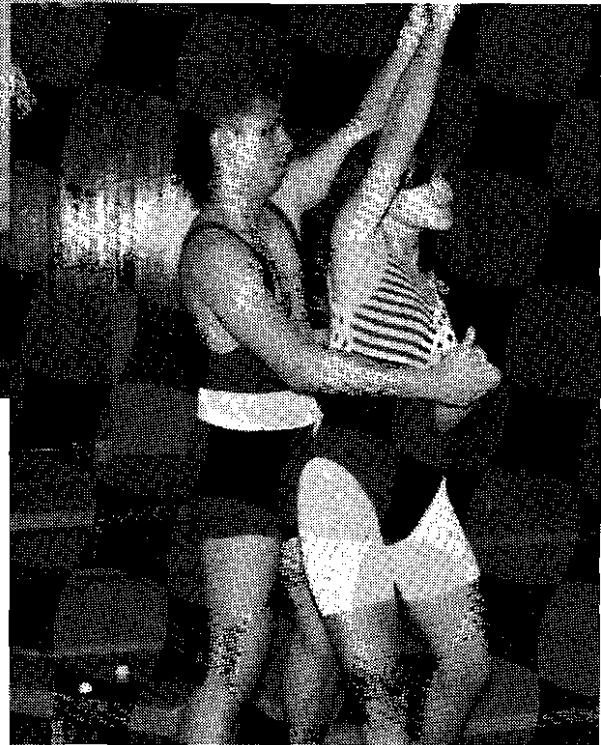
Imagery, Mind's Eye And Visualization

Imagery, mind's eye, visualization are terms used frequently in dance classes. They represent powerful concepts, often used by teachers and choreographers to enhance learning skills and performance. According to Smith (1990), imaging is a 'mental process similar to an actual experience without the actual experience taking place'. Imagery is a particularly useful device for teachers who wish to stimulate children's creative potential. In creative dance, teachers are concerned with stimulating children's creative potential for movement. A teacher or choreographer can use imagery to either evoke a response from a student or dancer, or inspire the creation of movement. It can enrich a movement experience by adding an imaginative framework to a movement idea, eg. "walking on eggshells". Imagery is the starter or catalyst for creative movement and it stimulates the whole child (the body, the mind and the imagination). It helps to broaden movement sensation and understanding, and develop and stimulate a rich movement repertoire. A teacher with a wealth of images in hand can find concise ways of describing a movement, to help students with limited movement background.

The sources for imagery abound, and are not limited to the visual, but include the auditory and kinaesthetic senses, as well.



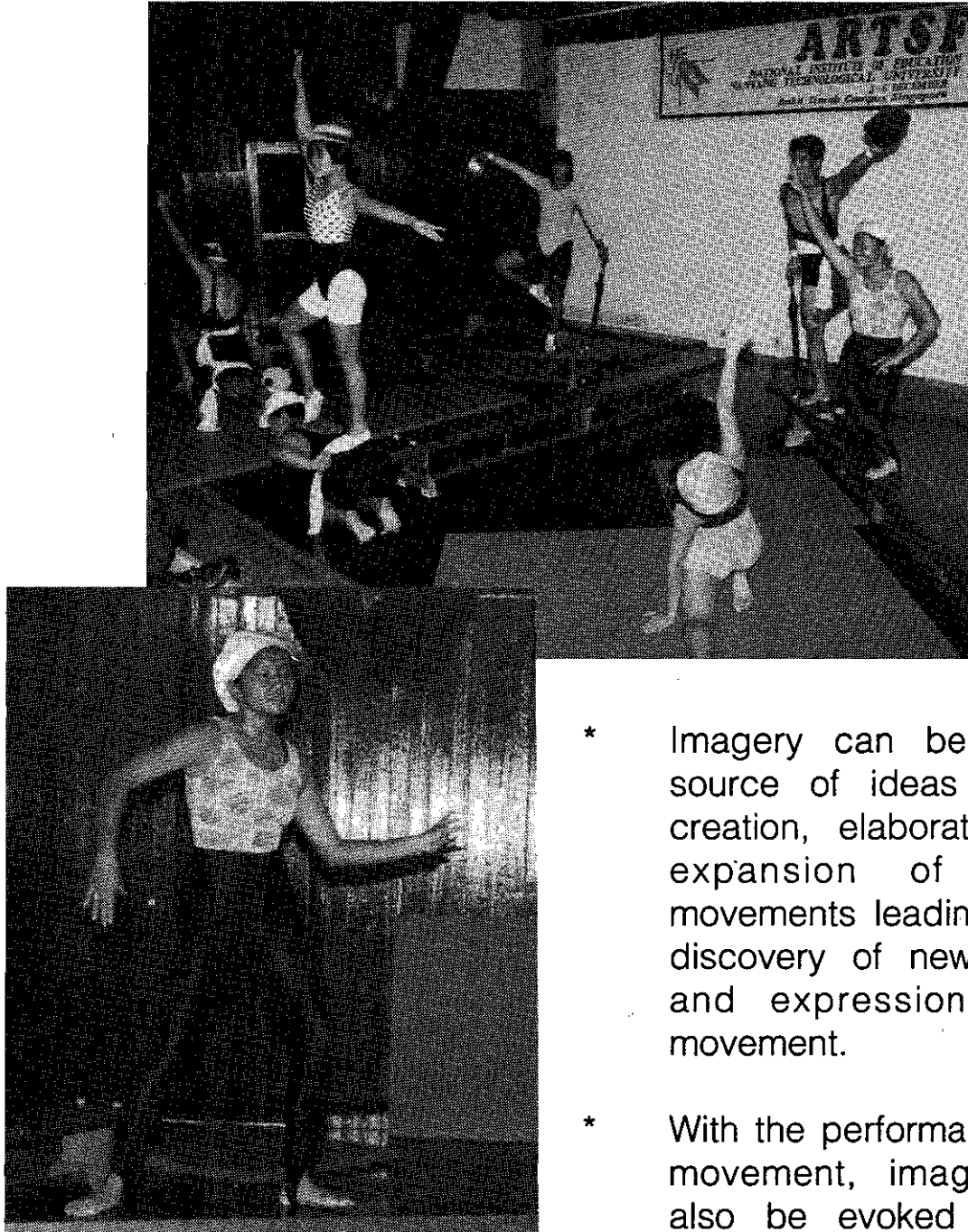
In her article, "The Use of Imagery in Children's Dance – Making it Work", Purcell (1990) examines how imagery can be used effectively in creative dance for children.



Imagery And Dance

Imagery is extensively used in dance by all teachers. Particularly in the creative and performance settings, dance teachers working with children or adults use imagery pertaining to emotional states, story lines, or other forms of imagination to create the proper interpretive framework for their students. The author emphasizes several pertinent points as to the value of imagery:

- * Images can either help to communicate the intent of a movement or stimulate movement ideas.
- * Images serve as a common ground in establishing understanding between the teacher and the students with regard to the intent of either a single movement or a complete dance.



- * Imagery can be a rich source of ideas for the creation, elaboration and expansion of dance movements leading to the discovery of new feeling and expressions of a movement.
- * With the performance of a movement, images can also be evoked for the audience as well.

Planning The Dance Lesson

In planning children's dance lessons, the author advocates that:

- * The teacher design a sequence of dance experiences based on one or more objectives.
- * The teacher structure the lesson around a variety of components such as warm-up and technique exercises, exploration, improvisation, composition and performance.

- * Images be interwoven throughout the above components to enhance the communication, stimulation or elaboration of movements.
- * The types of images used should be directly related to the objective of the lesson throughout. An example is given in the usage of the imagery of how spaghetti looks and feels before and after it is cooked, to stimulate the exploration of the lesson objective of the discovery and exploration of straight and curved lines in body shape and movement.

Making Imagery Relevant For The Students

The author emphasizes the importance of choosing images in a dance lesson that are relevant to the students. The appropriateness of the selected images can be assessed with regard to:

1. Events and experiences to which the child has been exposed.
2. The socioeconomic and cultural background of the child.
3. The age and developmental level of understanding of the child.

The author further advocates that the teacher explore the selected image verbally with the students first as in the form of a discussion. This could include the shape, colour, texture, energy, movements and other qualities exhibited by the image. Each child should be given the opportunity to explore as many different images as possible until he/she finds out that is exciting.

Some Useful Examples Of Imagery In Practice

Several other examples in the usage of imagery have been provided by the author. These are in the:

1. Exploration of dance movement elements such as time, space, weight and energy. For example, in a lesson focusing on tempo, the teacher could provide a possible task of, "pretend you are moving as fast as a speeding train".

2. Creation of an environment eg. "The room has become very dark and cold. There are giant shapes around the edges and they are closing in on you". In this image, students can be inspired to express their feelings about being in that environment. Similarly an existing sequence of movement, a "run, jump and freeze-in-a-shape" movement can be modified to take on a different use of energy, space and time if used in an imaginary environment of bright, warm sunshine instead of a dark, cold place.
3. Usage of the qualities of an object. The characteristics such as colour, texture, weight, shape, sound and smell which are inherent in every object can be used to initiate exploration of movement and shape. For example, a ball, the round shape of which can be used to create movements and shapes that reflect roundness in one's own body or its parts. Likewise, the texture of a ball can be explored eg. "Is the ball rough, smooth, hard, soft or bumpy? Make a movement that is soft".
4. Development of a sequence or storyline for a dance. Young children are better able to remember a sequence of movements or compose a dance if imagery is depicted as a story or a series of events. An example is given of the image of a cat waking up which could be used to perform a series of warm-up stretches.
5. Utilisation of events, people and personal experiences which can produce images that can be expressed and communicated through dancing. Each child is said to possess an entire range of both positive and negative experiences. The example of the experience of a pet dying leaves a child with memories and feelings that may produce images that can inspire movements which reflect his/her feelings.

Implications

Berrol (1984) stated, "Movement experiences shape the order and meaning that children ascribe to their world, furnishing . . . the building blocks of their development". Hence the role of teachers is to encourage children to discover and to extend their impulse to move. It is through the use of imagery that we can unlock children's

imaginations and help them feel confident in expressing themselves. Inhibitions decrease as children are given the opportunity to portray characters or objects. For many children, this opportunity to express feelings, experiment with different roles and explore movement abilities is very rewarding. It enables them to feel good about themselves.

In conclusion, the author states clearly that given the variety of ways in which images can be represented, it is important that the children be allowed to discover and create their own meanings about the images as individuals.

George Graham (1978) emphasizes that it is equally important to avoid the trap of total reliance on imagery to provide the stimuli for dance experiences. By simply asking the child to be "different things" each time produces little in improving the quality of the children's movement. To work on a concept of slow, heavy movement, for instance, a teacher may ask children to move as if the floor was covered with knee deep mud. This image can be a helpful reinforcer for the desired concept but it will not teach the children the functional understanding of slow, heavy movement as a concept that can be transferred to other movement situations. Hence, imagery can be a useful reinforcer for the desired movement concepts but by itself it cannot enhance the quality of the children's movements.

Finally, imagery is used in dance not only to facilitate movement, but also to enhance alignment or posture. Known as ideokinesis, first proposed by Sweigard (1975), it is used as a facilitator for learning more efficient posture. Used in the educational setting as in the teaching of English, Literature, History, Geography and even Science, imagery provides a powerful aid for instruction. In sports too, it has become a useful tool in the acquisition of motor skills. It is used to enhance performance by "seeing oneself" succeed at a skill or activity prior to the actual event.

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