DANCE TEACHERS

KEEPING THE BODY HEALTHY THROUGH CROSS TRAINING IN PILATES

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ABSTRACT

Many people think that Joseph Pilates created Pilates for dancers or that he was a dancer himself, but this is not true. Pilates was first used to help the disabled and sick during WWI. Even though Pilates is for everyone, it can be especially useful to individuals who use their bodies as part of their daily lives or professions. Therefore, Pilates can play a key role in dance teachers cross training. Dance teachers have a difficult time maintaining their body’s health so that they can remain fit for the entirety of their career. One would think that since dance teachers have to be on their feet and moving throughout their workday that they should be in excellent health, but this is far from the truth. Dance teachers just like others have postural problems, misalignments, and neuromuscular patterning and need to train their bodies to correct these issues. Pilates is the training solution for dance teachers.
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ANATOMICAL DESCRIPTION WITH DIAGRAM OF TRUNK & SHOULDER

The abdominals contain four main muscles: the rectus abdominal (the top layer), the external oblique (top side wrapping muscles), the internal oblique (inner side wrapping muscles) and the transverse (the deepest level of the abdominals). The shoulder area contains the deltoid muscle (defines the shoulders look) and the pectoralis major, the upper trapezius and latissius dorsi also play a role with shoulder strength and flexibility.

Dance teachers need to focus on their core strength, especially working the transverses abdominals to help them maintain proper posture and alignment. The shoulder is an area that most dance teachers don’t focus on, but it plays a key role in body alignment and strength.
WHY PILATES FOR DANCE TEACHERS

As a dance teacher, you must not only teach your students discipline and technique, you must teach them to find the mind/body and spirit connection that is needed to transform dance steps into art. One large issue that most teachers have is that they lose sight of the mind/body connection and practical exercises that would make them stronger movers and more effective instructors. Just like many other professions, dance teachers have postural problems, misalignments caused by imbalances and neuromuscular patterning. Pilates is a regimented way for dance teachers to cross train their bodies and minds to better benefit the students they develop.

Imagine standing for eight hours a day, have to walk, roll on the ground, jump up and down, and continuality use only one side of your body. That is a typical day for a dance teacher. Even though dance teachers are moving throughout their work day, they are not always mentally connected to the movements. A dance teacher’s focus is on watching how others move and use their bodies, not their own. Even if a dance teacher is able to take a dance class for themselves, this is not enough to keep their body healthy and balanced for a long career. Adding Pilates and a cardio workout to a dance regimen would address all the problems that are created by this unique work environment.

Dance teachers need to maintain their whole body by focusing first on the core and then working throughout the entire body. Core strength is important for everyone,
including dance teachers because without a balance of strength and flexibility in the abdominals and back muscles, you cannot maintain proper posture and your body will have to compensate in other areas. Pilates is centered on strengthening the core and also working the entire body, which makes it the perfect training regimen for dance teachers. Dance teachers can also have tight hip flexors from standing and moving all day. This can affect ones posture and needs to be addressed. In Pilates, there are several exercises that focus on strengthening and stretching the hip flexors, which would really benefit dance teachers. Dance teachers are also manipulating students’ bodies and placement while teaching; this can include moving their own bodies in unusual ways and demonstrating how not to perform certain movements. Therefore, dance teachers need to be reminded and taught about how to use proper posture while teaching and become aware of when and why they are or are not using proper posture. Pilates embodies many similar movement patterns to dance so it can enlighten dance teachers on how to refocus their minds and bring new awareness to the body.

Dance teachers will tend to overuse one side of their body and need help in keeping their body balanced. When teaching a dance class, teachers usually demonstrate only the first side of the combination or they will repeat a certain section over and over again until students have understood the movement and can perform it on their own. This can cause misalignments in the body due to over use in that area. Pilates can help correct the imbalances that are created in the dance studio by working the body in harmony and balance. Dance teachers don’t necessarily focus on correct movement
patterns and placement while demonstrating movements. Correct movement patterning, so that one moves their body in the most efficient way, is another benefit of Pilates. It is difficult for dance teachers to keep their muscles warm and ready to move when teaching, so many teachers end up demonstrating movements that they’re not ready and able to perform, which can cause misalignments in the body or injury. Pilates is a low stress warm up that will keep the body flexible and aligned throughout a dance class.

Like most professions, dance teachers have neuromuscular patterning that occurs due to job related movements and daily stress. The personal holding patterns triggered by physical movement and mental occurrences require a special kind of movement therapy. Many dancers and dance teachers seek movement therapy including Alexander technique, Feldenkrais method and Pilates to correct the imbalanced patterning of everyday life. Pilates is the best mainstream movement therapy in society today for dance teachers and allows the dance community to connect with the general public.
CASE STUDY

I am a healthy 26 year old dance teacher that is currently using Pilates as a cross training method. I have been dancing for over 23 years and teaching dance for the past six years. I have been practicing Pilates for over ten years. I was first introduced to Pilates due to a hip injury that had occurred while dancing. As a result of improper training and neuromuscular patterning, I discovered that I could gain a lot from cross training my body and that Pilates was the perfect workout system because of the ideas and theories it embodies.

When I started teaching dance and dancing less myself, I uncovered some new lacking areas in my body and life style such as a decrease in cardio fitness, generalized muscle wasting due to less activity, increase body weight, and psychological disconnect from my body. Since I had lead a very active life style it was difficult to understand the changes that occurred in my body and why they were happening. For the first time in my life I had to think about keeping my body healthy and explore what I needed to do to maintain the body I desired. I decided to re-explore Pilates as a cross training tool for my new career and life.

When I practiced Pilates before, it was mainly to regain strength from an injury. Now as a dance teacher, I have even more goals from my Pilates workout including maintaining a healthy body and continuing to build strength and flexibility while also focusing on my mind/ body connection. I have personally discovered that the older I get the more I need to change my exercise habits and make sure that I am focusing on my
body in a different way. Pilates works in achieving this goal due to the progressions in exercises and the fundamental movement material in the BASI repertory that will continue to challenge me forever.

**CONDITIONING PROGRAM**

My current goals for this conditioning program are to strengthen my abdominals and work on my shoulder strength and flexibility while still doing a full body workout.

**Intermediate Warm Up (Mat)**

*Standing Roll Down*
- Roll Up
- Supine Spine Twist
- Double Leg Stretch
- Single Leg Stretch
- Criss Cross

I chose this warm up because it is challenging for the abdominals in stamina and still warms up the body.

**Foot Work (Cadillac)**

- Parallel Heels
- Parallel Toes
- V Toes
- Open V Heels
- Open V Toes
- Calf Raises
- Prances
- Single Leg Heel
- Single Leg Toe
- Hip Opener
I chose the footwork on the Cadillac because it focuses on working the hamstrings and hip flexors to stretch the legs and hips while strengthening them to; it also works on pelvic stabilization.

**Abdominals (Reformer)**

*Abdominals Legs in Straps*
  - Double Leg
  - Double Leg with Rotation

I chose these exercises because they work on all the abdominal muscles, as well as pelvic stabilization and hip flexor strength.

**Hip Work (Cadillac)**

*Singe Leg Supine*
  - Frog
  - Down Circles
  - Up Circles
  - Hip Extension
  - Bicycle

I chose this series of exercises because it is in parallel and most dance teachers are working a lot in turn out and need to find this balance in their bodies.

**Spinal Articulation (Cadillac)**

*Tower*

I chose this exercise because dance teachers and dancers are one of the few populations that really have a good understanding of spinal articulation and therefore need to take spinal articulation to the top level and challenge their bodies.
Stretches (Pole)

*Poles Series*
- Shoulder Stretch
- Overhead Stretch
- Side Stretch
- Spine Twist

I chose this series because everyone needs to stretch their shoulders and this is one area that dance teachers don’t stretch on their own.

**Full Body I (Cadillac)**

*Kneeling Cat Stretch*

I chose this exercise because I believe it works on all the areas of focus that are important for me including abdominals, trunk stabilization, shoulder stretch, and spinal articulation.

**Arm Work (Cadillac)**

*Arms Standing Series*
- Chest Expansion
- Hug-A-Tree
- Up Circles
- Down Circles
- Punches
- Biceps
- Butterfly

I chose this series because it is a full arm and shoulder workout and includes trunk stabilization.

**Full Body II (Reformer)**

*Long Back Stretch*
I chose this exercise because of my background with Pilates; this is a difficult block and exercise and I feel that it reminds me of my journey with Pilates and shows me where I can go with Pilates plus it works my full body.

**Leg Work (Chair)**

*Hip Opener*

I chose this exercise because it is a nice balance from the hip work that was done earlier in parallel and this will help find balance in the body while working the hip external rotators.

**Lateral Flexion/Rotation (Chair)**

*Side Pike*

I chose this exercise because my oblique abdominals are one of the weakest areas in my body and this exercise strengthens and stretches the oblique abdominals and is an intense abdominal experience.

**Back Extension (Cadillac)**

*Prone I*

*Prone II*

I chose these exercises because they not only work the back extensors they also involve the shoulder and abdominals, which are areas that I am working on.

*Relaxation Position*

*Standing Roll Down*

I like to end the session with the relaxation position so that you can reflect on the session and what you learned and explored on your Pilates journey for that day. I also like to
begin and end the session with a standing roll down, this is great for the instructor and student to evaluate how the body has changed from the work that was done in the session.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, Pilates is a great method to help individuals build strength and flexibility in their bodies. This is especially true for dance teachers due to their unique work environment which cause issues with their posture, misalignments and also neuromuscular patterning. Pilates is a full body workout that can address all dance teachers’ issues while still challenging them as movers. In addition, Pilates focuses on the mind/body connection that is necessary for dance teachers to possess in order to stay healthy and happy for a lifetime. Dance teachers are helping to grow the artists and performers of the future and need to display a positive body image to their students. Pilates helps create a body that is healthy, strong and a great image for young dancers to embrace when training their own bodies.
Bibliography


