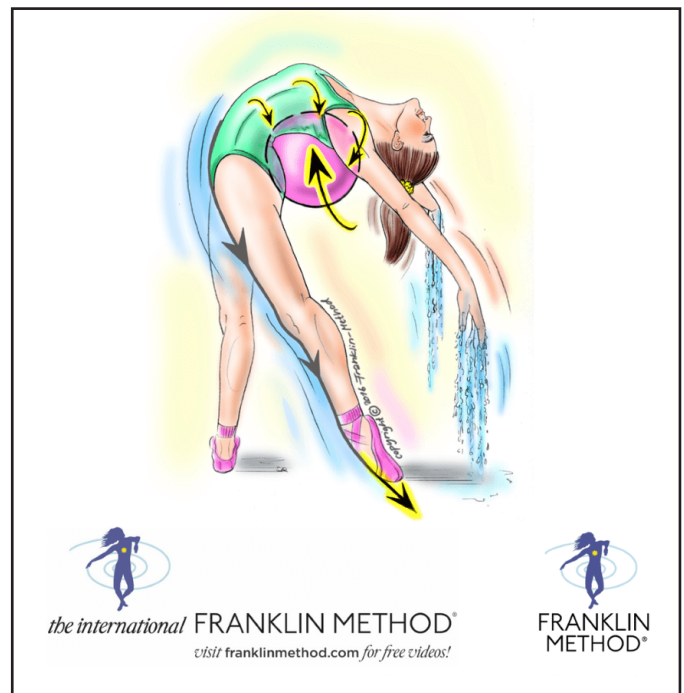
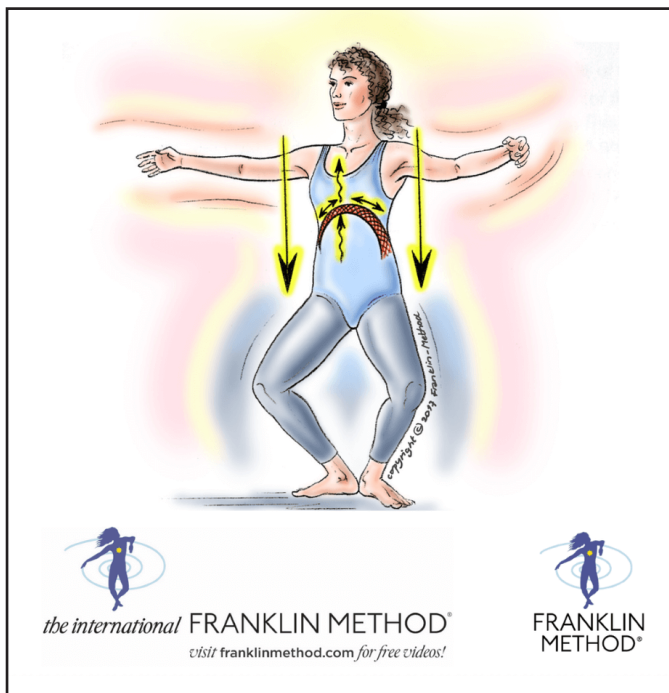


## Wellbeing Writing with Sarah Pritchard



We spoke to Sarah Pritchard – Registered Somatic Movement Educator and Advanced Franklin Method® Educator working with dancers.

### TELL US ABOUT YOUR PRACTICE – HOW DO YOU USE FRANKLIN METHOD® TO TREAT DANCE STUDENTS AND PROFESSIONALS?

The Franklin Method® is the tremendously powerful mind body system in which I help dancers of all abilities and ages create powerful and lasting change using our codified system of Dynamic Neurocognitive Imagery (TM).

My work with dancers is either in small groups or as individuals. In groups, we may focus upon improving a movement or exploring the potential textures or feelings of a type of movement that can then be taken away by them and used in a very creative way. Or, we have a detailed exploration of one aspect of our body and learn many options of what it can do to help us in movement. My one to one work is more problem solving and tailored towards helping the individual's specific goals, which could be anything from developing a felt sense of a system within the body that the dancer can use in a creative way, or looking at movement in its pure form before you layer the specific dance genre over the top. This work is more anatomical or biomechanical, but can really help a dancer re-establish that finer level of motor control and help them discover if there is anything they have been doing that is blocking movement or setting them up for discomfort in their body, as well as learn how to achieve their goal in a more comfortable way.

My role is as an educator, not a teacher, and there is an important difference; I'm there to help the individual by offering a range of strategies to them to improve movement and enhance their mind body and body mind connection.

Franklin Method® sessions are experiential and student centered. It is important to me that my classes are safe spaces, and my role is one of support through the processes of the work we do. Dancers are encouraged to be themselves and take all of the labels and pressures away, and experience, and feel their body and the reality in the present moment. When we are fully present and able to feel our body, our motivation, engagement, and interest brings our brain and nervous system online. It is at that point we can bring about the biggest changes. By knowing where our starting point is, we can develop strategies to improve. Additionally, as we work with our actual reality, not any narrative from the past or the future, we are able to learn how to recognise positive change happening, and eventually we become less judgmental and more compassionate towards our bodies that are so amazing and are working for us all of the time.

My work to optimize the movement potential of the individual body, harnessing whatever system in the body may be helpful, helping the body work in a comfortable, efficient, powerful and healthy way. In current times, a lot of my focus has been on helping dancers quieten their minds and bodies to help them gain quality rest, as well as work with their bodies in a gentle way. The different waves of the pandemic have led to different waves of issues in bodies, and I have definitely seen a pattern across all of the movers I teach! When I moved my work online due to the pandemic I found that the work I did with the dancers became more powerful in many ways, not least because that felt sense suddenly became a critical skill to have that they could then employ in their dance classes where suddenly there was no teacher, no dance floor, no mirror. In an age where many of us are still so distanced and touch has become alien or forbidden, developing that felt sense and being in state of embodiment is a much-needed skill for all round wellbeing and our ability to manage the changes and stressors we all encounter.

## **HOW MIGHT FRANKLIN METHOD® BE APPLIED TO BENEFIT OR ENHANCE TECHNICAL TRAINING IN DANCE?**

Dancers are often looking for ways to improve their movement skills and what Franklin Method® offers, whatever level you work at, is the opportunity to fine tune movement inside your own body to optimize performance and health. It can also help you develop greater expressivity through what you do. Franklin Method® gives you tools that are always available and free to use. You can use these tools without anyone else seeing them at work or if you are not moving- you can be practicing movement when tired, injured or travelling, using your mind, and do so with accuracy.

When I was dancing, I was taught by wonderful teachers that shared their own creativity with imagery that was beautiful, but highly personal to their own experience, which, at times I found challenging to reproduce. Equally, I worked with teachers that developed some powerful negative imagery that did not help me achieve what I was looking for and created a lot of tension and wear and tear in my body! For anyone who teaches movement, it is incredibly important to be aware of the imagery you use and make sure it is positive, constructive and appropriate to allow you to get the very best from those you teach and help them to improve. My work is slightly different as the Franklin Method's® use of dynamic imagery is codified, incredibly precise and works with a multiple layering of different kinds of imagery within different systems of the body depending on what precisely I am trying to target. Additionally, it helps dancers discover imagery that works for them, that helps them understand and feel the anatomical, biomechanical or physiological reality of their body in motion, and it is positive, motivational and personal. For example, we could explore the pelvis using a combination of anatomical, and biomechanical imagery. We learn to image

in 3 dimensions what the pelvis looks like from multiple angles, as well as start to sense and feel and embody its subtle movements in healthy movement. We also learn about unhealthy movement too, because it is important that our brain recognizes what it does and does not like, so that it can reproduce more of what it wants! In the process, we start to develop and refine our own body schema and understanding in a felt or embodied way. If our mind can start to co-ordinate movement, and we move into more of a felt experience of our anatomical reality, suddenly so much more becomes possible in movement. It is comfortable, healthy, range of motion improves and the potential for injury lessens as we are not forcing our bodies into movement that can cause us harm. Tension can be removed from the system as the mind starts to co-ordinate movement in a harmonious way and our minds also settle down significantly. We can also direct that imagery into the quality of the movement sense we are looking for on a motivational, kinesthetic or metaphorical level and that's where a lot of personalization of imagery comes into play. What works for one dancer will be a very different experience for another, and that is why our process puts the student at the centre. Once the dancer has been offered a range of strategies they are able to select what really works for them. That in itself is so positive because it gives the dancer much greater autonomy and self confidence in what they do.

One of the most common areas of the body I'm continuously working on with dancers is with their pelvis, because of its key role in force absorption and resulting impact it has on all of the joints above and below.

For so many dancers learning about these very subtle movements in our joints really helps create that stability through awareness of the body in motion, as well as in moments of suspension, impact or balance. For those dancers who have excess range of motion in their bodies, learning this skill of awareness and joint positioning can be hugely important. There is so much that is possible and complimentary – for example, I have currently been working with dancers developing awareness of and accessing peripheral space, as well working more intimately within themselves by working with our organs or the nervous system – places in the body that you may rarely consider in formal training.

There is so much for dancers to learn about tension and holding patterns within their body, how it manifests, where it manifests and easy things they can do to reduce that down or take it away quickly to remain optimal and healthy. Additionally, there are so many exercises Eric has developed using the Franklin Method® balls and bands combined with the imagery that dancers can use to help them with their warm-up, or with conditioning for dance that takes up very little space in their dance bags. I do think this is important because not every dancer is elite and blessed with their own accessible gym, so once learnt, dancers can take away the tools of the Franklin Method® and work independently with minimal cost. Today we have so many options from different movement systems, but finding one that is dance specific, affordable and helpful once you stand up and start moving is really important!

## **WHAT SKILLS DOES THE FRANKLIN METHOD® DEVELOP IN THOSE WHO USE IT, AND HOW MIGHT THESE BE BENEFICIAL FOR THOSE IN DANCE?**

Embodiment through our system of Dynamic Neurocognitive Imagery (DNI) helps to develop precise motor control by harnessing the tremendous power of the brain. Franklin Method® has its own scientific institute that is continuously researching the efficacy of what we do and there are many [papers demonstrating the positive results Franklin Method®](#) has for dancers. Our most recent paper examined the use of a DNI intervention on developpé performance, finding significant increases in hip range of motion, developpé height and pelvic

postural alignment (Abraham et al., 2019 – <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00382/full>). The Institute has also researched into the use of mental imagery with those who have Parkinson's and have found positive results for this population improving their mental representations, also called pelvic schema, which is valuable for cognitive and motor functions (Abraham et al., 2018), as well as conceptualizing imagery's effect on fascial tissues (Abraham et al., 2020).

Franklin Method® offers benefits to for everyone, and dancers will particularly benefit as they are often looking for optimal and precise movement that requires very advanced levels of motor control. From that increased co-ordination the body and its various systems can operate in harmony, which is so important not only for dancing life, but also for our overall health and wellbeing. There are ways to access greater ranges of motion without stretching beyond the limits, to find power and work without exhausting yourself, to find a soft landing into the floor or ways to find stability without forcing the body into a static position, which generates a lot of physical tension, to name a few. Franklin Method® is also fantastic at helping dancers bring their physical and mental state into greater balance, we learn ways to calm the nervous system down, to optimize our breathing and to prepare the body for performance or a rest that is helpful. Being aware of, understanding and employing our own imagery within our day to day lives in a way that is helpful and supportive is so important for everyone, but training that imagery consistently can help develop an inner calm that is so needed in the exciting, and at times stressful, world of dance. Eric Franklin, founder of the Franklin Method® often asks; 'Can you let go of your assumptions? Can you let your body teach you? These question are so important for dancers and, if they really do follow it through with absolute intention and focus they really can make some tremendous changes to their movement. With that greater felt understanding of how our individual and unique body works, it brings us that felt knowledge, empowerment and a greater sense of autonomy over what we do. We really do understand how to take care of ourselves, and how to be a lot kinder to ourselves. We can self-regulate and feel more able to cope with all of the different situations that may arise in dance or life as a whole.

## **REFLECTING ON YOUR EXPERIENCE TEACHING THE FRANKLIN METHOD® IN DANCE, HAVE YOU MADE ANY KEY OBSERVATIONS?**

The best part of my role is to see that love and joy of dance reawaken in so many dancers I work with. Often, or that dancers are searching for something that often they are not able to articulate in words. So much of this is due to asking so much of themselves technically, often coming to me overworked and very tired in the mind, the body or both, and, as a result, they can lose sight of why they started dancing in the first place. A key part of my role is fostering an environment where a dancer is absolutely welcome to try things out and to be included in their learning without the fear of being criticized for what they do. Student centered learning is fundamental to what Franklin Method® is about, and, in my experience, dancers react to this form of learning in such positive ways and they really can make progress at such speed. It is a joy to help someone discover movement to be comfortable, or what we often describe as efficient and effortless. It is a greater pleasure to help a dancer learn how to work with their body instead of fighting it. In dance, pain and discomfort are not to be expected or inevitable, but sadly, we are still living in an age where I witness this at times to be a badge of honor or part of the course.

To see a dancer's reaction when they find what they describe to me as that 'ah ha' moment is wonderful. These moments are times when they have suddenly discovered that felt or embodied sense of what they had been asked to find in their body in so many different ways

but unable to access. Or, they have suddenly discovered that they can move with such ease and fluidity that they could not have imagined. When dancers can suddenly find that depth of pli , that elusive balance, that control over their landing or that sensation in movement they had been looking for, this tells me that there is definitely further scope to develop a more detailed and accurate knowledge of the body into every dance class, regardless what level that dancer is working at, not only for healthy function but also for improved technique!

For me, it is more than that, because over longer periods of time I have seen with the dancers I have worked with a greater sense of calm, perspective, confidence and resilience – and eventually they come to that realization too! This is where Franklin Method® really helps dancers as it works holistically, because a healthy dancer is one that is healthy in body and mind; one that really understands how that interaction works and how it can improve movement or make movement really difficult. And that realization by the dancer that they have the capacity, ability and the autonomy to self-regulate, a skill so important in dance, for wellbeing, longevity and success, is a very important discovery to make and feel. Dancers place so much pressure on themselves and current times add additional pressures that really have the potential to cause overload. It is so well known that overload, stress and tension is a pathway to illness, injury, burnout and really does not leave a dancer with any space to develop expressivity in what they do. Prior to the pandemic, I always loved to watch through the windows of any class to see what was going on, predicting what was going to happen – you can see and feel in human bodies the tension level, the frustration and the comparison. None of these things lead to a good outcome. Now, since the pandemic, a lot of my current work is focusing on developing the very gentle, calm and intimate work with the body, bringing dancers back home to their own bodies and their felt sense. Helping develop interoceptive skills, that very heightened awareness of their internal wellbeing, as well as giving them tools to help themselves at any point in their day settle their bodies and their minds is a key skill for any dancer for their longevity, performance outcome and health. To help them develop the capacity and skill to trust and listen to their bodies, and to have that sense of balance in the mind and the body is important for their overall wellbeing. We all experience times when we feel wonderful and we know what we can achieve when we feel our best, when we are rested, when we are relaxed. For when dancers take their labels away, take the pressure off themselves and really start that dialogue with their body and that listening in, movement improves rapidly. Most importantly of all, the inner confidence of the individual dancer develops and the wellbeing of the individual is enhanced and supported. That surely is a wonderful place to be!

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