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AAHPERD

April 2006

Leaps and Bounds: How TAGteach helps your dancers go further, faster!

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Leaps and Bounds: How TAGteach helps your dancers go further, faster!

Presenters: Beth Wheeler, Frank Corcoran

Session description: Tired of begging your dancers to point their feet? Using science-based TAGteach principles, take the frustration out of the dance environment—for your students and yourself! Discover how to create an interactive learning environment where dancers of all ages and disciplines are motivated and will work HARD to meet the criteria you set. Learn to break down and build strong technical skills that dancers will recall and repeat again and again. Find out how to seamlessly implement these methods into your existing lesson plans and achieve remarkable results—positively!

What is TAGteach?

TAGteach, **T**eaching with **A**coustical **G**uidance, is a science-based, positive reinforcement methodology that utilizes a proven and remarkably effective marker system. By marking a correct response (physical or behavioral), a neurological message is instantly received by the learner. Focus is placed on correct responses (positions, answers, behaviors) only—thus reinforcing and increasing repetition of those (desired) responses.

A new perspective

Dance education today is based on solid studies in the physiological and anatomical sciences as well as centuries of artistic tradition; verbally inherited methods of conditioning, technique, and vocabulary. Classical training has produced brilliant performers and proficient dabblers alike and has, as well, produced a myriad of sound syllabi in a wide variety of disciplines.

TAGteach aligns and supports all standard dance and movement syllabi, from Vaganova to Checchetti, RAD to Bourneville, Hatchett to Cohan, Gilbert to Dee, Pilates to Somatics and all others for which there is not enough space here to list. TAGteach is highly effective in providing a user-friendly process for dissecting such syllabus information into digestible pieces that students of all ages can absorb, understand, and perform successfully—again and again.

TAGteach encourages teachers and learners to share in the process of looking at learning from a new perspective, one that is interactive. We don't wish to change centuries of traditionally sound pedagogy but encourage educators and students to share and develop together a new view—to learn to see and present information in a way that is more efficiently absorbed, understood, and retained by the learner. The information is there—and TAGteach will help you discover a more effective way to present it.

The language of learning

TAGteach methods stand on the well-established scientific principles that underlie learning and reinforcement-based teaching. TAGteach utilizes operant conditioning, a marker signal (usually acoustic), and positive reinforcement. Let's define these and a few other related terms:

Operant conditioning: "Any procedure by which a response becomes more or less likely to occur, depending upon its consequences." It is crucial to note that, in TAGteach, the consequences are *always positive* and desired responses become more likely to occur.

Positive reinforcement: "A procedure in which a response is paired with a desired stimulus or event." Good things happen when a desired behavior or skill is presented!

Positive reinforcer: "Anything that, paired with a behavioral response, makes that response more likely to occur in the future; anything the learner will work to get more of." Praise, desired information (you did it right!) or even a trinket—whatever inspires the learner to apply themselves and motivates them to repeat the behavior.



Conditioned Reinforcer: “Any stimulus that has acquired positive reinforcing properties through association with other reinforcers: such as food, praise, or success.” Here it is—the marker.

(TAGteach technical terms from the *TAGteach Glossary*, copyright 2005, adapted from *Learning and Behavior*, third edition, by Paul Chance, Ph.D., Brooks Cole Publishers, Pacific Grove, CA 1994.)

Why the marker?

The marker is a conditioned reinforcer and positive stimulus that occurs simultaneously with a desired act or response. In TAGteach the marker is most often a clear audible sound delivered by a small handheld device (“tagger”) at the precise moment a requested response has been presented, much like the click of a camera shutter, taking a picture of exactly the desired behavior. The tagger sends a binary message. A tag means “yes!” The absence of a tag means “try again!” The tag immediately identifies the correct move so the learner can feel it, recall it, and repeat it correctly,

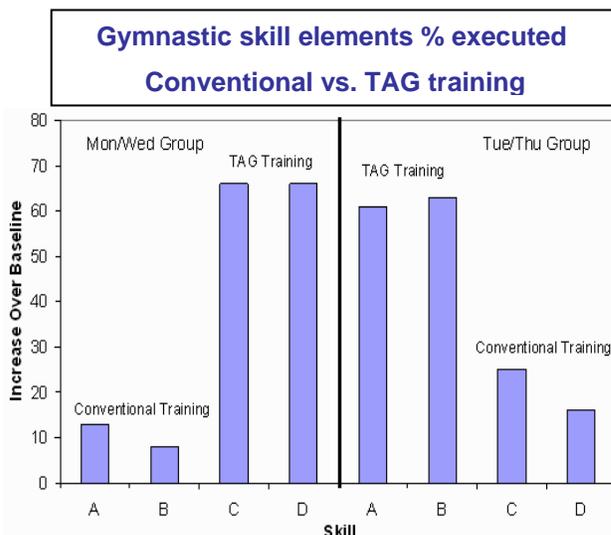
If the desired response in a particular barre exercise is stretched feet, the teacher would set up an activity where each time the dancer performs a tendu with a fully stretched foot she would receive a “tag.” Other consistently sharp sounds (a finger snap, click of the tongue, cane tap on the floor) or even physical markers (a touch on the shoulder) can be equally effective as long as they are always paired with positive reinforcement.

Sound as information

“But I say ‘good,’ isn’t that enough?” The answer is no. Language is confusing. The words we hear are synthesized with tone, inflection, and body language (sometimes in opposition), which can lead to misunderstandings and social considerations that often get in the way of learning. The tag is clear, precise, and consistent. No “translation” is required. It always means “Yes! That’s it, you did it correctly.” And, more importantly, the tag allows the learner to self assess, to take responsibility for the information. If there is no tag, the learner immediately begins to take stock. Their internal dialog: “What do I need to do to hear the tag? Oh, the tag point is stretched feet, I must not have been stretched enough, I can fix that.” And they do! This key factor enables the teacher to forgo the constant verbal correcting that leads to frustration and depletes motivation for both the learner and the teacher.

Breaking it down

The marker, though a distinctly valuable element of what makes TAGteach so effective, is but one aspect of this method’s information delivery that is unique and highly beneficial to the learning process. TAGteach has developed a system in which information is broken down into manageable pieces that allow, again, both the learner and the instructor to focus on one thing at a time. The information is clear, the goal achievable, the environment productive. Skill acquisition and retention increases at an impressive rate.



Highlights TAG results: Autism

- Toe walking: Decreased by 16% in 25 TAG sessions (after limited progress for 2 years)
- Vocal imitations: # correct increased 33% and 25% respectively for two subjects in 11 and 6 TAG sessions
- Other improvement areas:
 - social interaction, staying on task, eye contact, fine motor skills
 - teaching skills, troubleshooting

Research conducted by Applied Behavior Consultants, Inc. Sacramento CA; Victoria Fogel, BS, BCABA.



What's the point?

TAGteach information delivery is broken down into TAG points highlighted and consistently preceded by the phrase "The tag point is..." This phrase calls the learner to attention: "Something important is coming; *this* is what I need to focus on." The tag point is always a single response, action, or position that is instantly recognizable: a stretched knee, feet in a "V" (first position), arms "en bas," quiet voices. The tag point is designed to request what the teacher is looking for specifically and never outlines what the teacher does not want. To be clear, in TAGteach, one would not use the phrase "don't bend your knees." Instead, a TAGteacher would outline the information like this: "The tag point is... straight knees." We call this TAGtalk.

TAGtalk enables the learner to create a mental or neural snapshot. And, equally important, this information can be acquired and internalized by, not only the student performing the task, but by all watching as well. Herein lays the pot of gold in TAGteach; peer tagging.

Never a dull moment

How does a teacher involve all students throughout an entire class? Surely, there are times when one student will need attention while the others must keep themselves occupied. In a dance class the common solution is "stretch." Not a bad choice, though not necessarily the most effective use of time. And then, when instructing the class as a group, how is a teacher assured that each student has absorbed the information? Repetition of terminology doesn't necessarily mean the concept has been digested. We have found peer tagging to be the answer to these and many common class management and assessment issues. While students tag each other, it becomes evident if the "Tagger" (the child tagging) truly understands the tag point. In fact, Suzann Shiemer (nationally recognized expert in assessing student learning and author of *Assessment Strategies for Elementary Physical Education*) calls TAGteach and peer tagging "...one of the most important developments in the teaching of physical education. When I'm TAGteaching, I know exactly when my students have learned the skill and, just as importantly, so do they!"

Reinforcers that rate

Throughout the TAGteach process, students are an irreplaceable part of the design, implementation, and success of each lesson. They actively assist in choosing and outlining tag points, they continuously tag (assess) themselves and each other, and they actively participate in the design of reinforcement plans. From stickers to pizza parties, dancers take responsibility for creating a program that works to provide information and reinforcements that mean something to them. TAGtaught dancers are invested, motivated, proficient, and happy. What more can a teacher ask for?

More than motor

TAGteach applications are reaching far beyond the dance studio. To date, TAGteach programs have been applied in mainstream and special education classrooms, corporate training, home schooling, nuclear regulatory safety, driving schools, language lessons, and a vast range of professional and amateur sports. **Where will you take TAGteach?**

The TAGdance Instructional CD set & Lesson Plans in dance and gymnastics are currently available for further study and implementation at: www.tagteach.com

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If you missed our session and would like more information, please visit www.tagteach.com or contact Beth Wheeler at 781-631-8978 (studio), beth@tagteach.com.

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