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**Pilates – To the Core:
Using TAGteach™ to deliver
the information your students need
to succeed.**

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Pilates – To the Core: Using TAGteach™ to deliver the information your students need to succeed.

Presenters: Beth Wheeler, Frank Corcoran

Session description: You've heard the phrase over and over, but what exactly is "core" and how can you teach others to identify what it feels like when it is being used properly? Presented as a full Pilates class, this session will offer key classic exercises supported by the immediate and consistently positive feedback of the TAGteach Method. You'll experience the satisfaction of information delivered clearly and in easily digestible pieces. You will also learn how to apply this most effective information delivery system to your own teaching.

Cashing In, Losing Out

The appeal of Pilates is HUGE (great, you got them in the door!) yet the enormous frustration many experience in trying to digest the "core" concept blocks a large population from getting the most out of their classes. The A type personalities will force their way through, pushing to "get a workout in", while gaining little in the way of true learning and quite possibly injuring themselves in the process. Meanwhile, the less driven often simply don't come back.

And what about you, the teacher? You are ready. You have invested years in the study of the Pilates Methodology, and most likely, many other years in dance and/or movement physiology. You get it!! But you're worried that your students don't. How do you impart all of your knowledge so that they, too, can benefit from the education you so wish to share? The answer is TAGteach.

Why TAGteach?

Backed by over 50 years of science, TAGteach delivers what coaches and teachers dream about - an effective information delivery system that produces identifiable results in an all positive environment. TAGteach uses a marker system that clearly identifies the exact moment the learner has achieved a called for action. The moment the action is achieved the learner hears an acoustic signal – a tag – that informs them "yes, that is it!" This system enables targeted responses and bridges communication gaps - a perfect fit for such nebulous terms as "core" or "neutral spine". These terms, of course, are common stumbling blocks students (and teachers!) find frustrating in Pilates and Dance.

The truth is, many of the people who really need Pilates are often least likely to have a dance or movement background, the unique physical (and verbal) vocabulary to help them truly absorb the information. When confronted with the daunting task of translating new language, while working to be physically compliant to goals that are unclear, frustrated students will simply bale. TAGteach removes such frustration as it provides the system to break the information down into digestible pieces that enable laser focus, clear communication and truly constructive self assessment – all valuable steps to student (and teacher!) success.

It's about One Thing – the Tag Point.

As dancers, as people, we've all been students in a learning situation where we were willing to do just about anything to perform what the teacher wanted—if only we'd been able to understand exactly what he or she was asking for. It is astounding that when a teacher is asked "What do you want the student to do, *specifically*?" the teacher often has no response. Unfortunately, we must admit that *we do the same thing*. Often, as the teacher, we don't know *exactly* what we want our students to do. Of course, we have a general idea: we want them to use their breath, hold center, feel in control! But what *specifically* will make those things occur?

**A tag point is:
"A single goal
recognized and accepted
by both parties,
acoustically or
otherwise marked
as it is occurring."**



Let's talk placement. Lynda is 52, quite fit, bright and determined yet she just can't seem to get the basic Pilates placement during her matt work. No problem, we have lots of helpful advice. "Honey, don't hold your breath! Keep your eyes open. Don't clench your jaw. Lengthen your neck. Lift your chin. Try not to flatten your back. You've got to keep a neutral pelvis." Lynda tries again, no improvement and her frustration is mounting. Now, the TAGteach foundational approach is to use only positive language, so we need to replace the negative phrasing with positive comments. Perhaps instead of "Don't clench your jaw" we substitute "Let your Jaw drop". Instead of "Don't hold your breath!" we use "Take a breath". Instead of "Try not to flatten your back" it's "Keep a natural curve to your spine". Good, great, all positive. Off we go – we list our new and improved version. Lynda tries again; still no improvement – now she's really frustrated, and so is the teacher. After all, the instructions were really clear – or were they? Will it help to say these comments louder, with more enthusiasm? What if we say them in a silly voice or jump up and down to accentuate their importance? If we list them here again, you'll probably scream or put the page down and walk away. You definitely won't absorb the instruction. Yet we all tend to do exactly that with our students. We repeat the same comments over and over even when they're not working. Seems silly, doesn't it? And we wonder why our students look at us like we've lost our minds.



Information is a good thing. Too much information is just plain too much information. Confusing at best, defeating at its worst. Defining which pieces are worth keeping and which we can toss is where the design of the **tag point** comes in so handy. Quick! Get the funnel. Let's pour all of the information we have on hand into the top and see what **one thing** comes out the bottom—the tag point.

Here's How

First, we need to look at what *exactly* we want. It must be only ONE thing. Yup, we must exclude multiple requests. We want our learners to be able to focus on only the task at hand. "But wait," you shudder, "if she only focuses on one thing, everything else will fall apart." Well, the truth is, it may (for a brief amount of time). But, if we choose the one thing that will solve more than one problem, we are creating laser focus that will allow for incremental successes more readily. If we build on these individual successes these traits will be more firmly ingrained and recalled at will, allowing the overall skill to be strengthened and retained.

So let's ask ourselves again, what do we want Lynda to do? "Stop losing her core when she moves." Oh, wait. That's negative. "Maintain proper placement (core)." Good, now we're on to something. But will Lynda know what that means? Will she be able to identify which part of her body or which adjustment will create proper placement? What does the word "proper" or "core" mean *to her*? Like "pull up," is it some holy grail that no one quite has a definitive meaning for? More importantly, does it mean something to her that is *different* than what it means to you?

The definition of a tag point states that the point must be "recognized and accepted" by both parties. To do so, it must be observable, objective, and measurable. Both parties must be able to "see" or understand the point as it occurs. And, the tag point must elicit a binary response with regard to accomplishment. It is either a yes (achieved) or no (self assess and try again).

Let's take the chin, for example. Imagine Lynda is lying on her back. If we wanted to create a tag point for "lift your chin" that is observable and measurable, we might say "The tag point is...chin perpendicular to the floor." Now both parties understand exactly what is being called for. Lynda could then be asked to move her head in various patterns and each moment she hits perpendicular, she'll receive a tag and know, absolutely, that she has succeeded. My guess though, is that this won't necessarily solve the entire placement problem.



Hmm, OK then, we're back to the funnel—what will create proper placement? Let's look again at the things we've tossed in so far:

- Take a breath.
- Keep your eyes open.
- Let your jaw drop.
- Lengthen neck.
- Perpendicular chin. [we've already gone over this one!]
- Keep a natural curve to your spine.
- Neutral pelvis.

Proper placement can be accomplished with eyes shut so let's put that aside. Arguably, you can locate core placement while holding your breath – this is not optimal, but not a deal killer so, for the moment, let's put that aside as well. These items can and should be addressed, though you may choose to create tag points for them later, your goal now is to address the general placement issue. We've already worked out the chin issue. But that won't solve the overall placement either. So, we're left with: lengthen neck, natural spinal curve and neutral pelvis. Now, we're on to something. As we know, these three things are all connected, literally, by the spine. By focusing our attention on the pelvis/spinal base we have a largely increased opportunity to create a tag point that will solve more than one problem. Great, neutral pelvis? Not quite. We still have a language glitch here. What "neutral" is to you may be very different than that perceived by your learner. Further, is "neutral" measurable, observable, objective? Not necessarily.

Take a moment to find neutral pelvis yourself and define what it feels like to you. What parts of your body are involved? Look in the mirror, get all wiggly and then align your pelvis. What changes? For us, a clear picture is "hip bones point to ceiling." In fact, it would be difficult for the student to overarch or contract in this position. It would also be more likely that the entire spine maintains its natural curve and that the neck naturally lengthens as torque is released from the spine. Ta da! Here is what drops out of the bottom of the funnel. The tag point is...hip bones point to ceiling.

To further personalize the tag point it is even more effective if the student uses a label (cue) that means something to them personally. This is not always functional in a large class setting but on the occasion when one student may be having continued trouble it can be a very quick trick. Lynda expressed that she could imagine flashlights on her hips and they were shining on the ceiling. Perfect! For Lynda, the tag point is... flashlights.

Tag Point Tips

While creating tag points we want to insure that the information is unemotional. This way, our students are allowed to focus purely on the task at hand and their own goals, not those they may (correctly or incorrectly) perceive as ours. To do this, we remove the words "you," "I," and "and" from our tag point design. If we say "I want you to..." The implied message is that I, the teacher, don't particularly care whether you want to do this or not. Not necessarily creating an interactive, participatory learning environment...

**Remove the words
"you," "I," and "and."
Instead use:
"The tag point is...."**

Removing the word "and" from tag point design simply lessens the odds of multiplying our focus and allows one single task to be addressed, thus setting our learners up for success.

Tag points can be designed to accommodate just about every part of your lesson plan and curriculum. Of course, tag points are highly effective for technical work, but at our studio we find them just as useful for a variety of other aspects of learning and for a variety of ages and classes, including:



Studio Policies: The tag point is... sign-in at front desk before class.
Vocabulary: The tag point is...the ballet word for this (teacher demonstrates a movement).
Dress code: The tag point is...ballet buns before you enter the studio.
Class management: The tag point is...sit criss-cross applesauce.
Behavior: The tag point is...standing quietly.
Bonding: The tag point is...sit next to someone you don't know.

TAGteach Highlights

Though it may feel bulky at first to use the phrase “The tag point is...,” we absolutely encourage you to do so. We have found that this phrase acts like a highlighter, calling enthusiastic attention to the information. It is like exclaiming “hey, this is it!” You will find your students visibly relieved to know *exactly*, at any given moment, what your mutual goal is. And you will find that they are wonderfully creative tag point designers themselves.

As we mentioned earlier, when teaching, we often don't know what the next tag point should be at any given moment in class. This is not a bad thing! In fact, opening up the opportunity for our students to create tag points themselves affords them invaluable participation in their own learning. This process allows our students to help dissect movement, to discover for themselves the cause and effect on their own success that each choice has, thus creating fully reflective learners—creative thinkers, divested from rote mimicry.

For our staff, designing tag points affords a sharing and camaraderie unlike anything we've previously experienced in a studio environment. No longer do teachers feel like they have to “know it all” or they'll look “less than.” Our teachers happily share the prospect of designing tag points not only with their students, but with their fellow teachers as well. Dynamic conversations ensue. Competition amongst our teachers is a non-issue.

Cashing In, Winning Out

Time and again we hear from teachers who wistfully express “if only I had been taught like this...” Though we can't change these teachers' frustrating past experiences, we can help to insure that their students learn more successfully. The clarity TAGteach provides allows your students to not only feel such success but to be able to document their accomplishments. Instead of feeling like they are studying an elusive foreign language, your students are empowered in the knowledge that they have worked alongside their teacher to build a new language that they truly understand – dare I say, to their core. We teachers, directors and studio owners have the opportunity to facilitate this kind of learning. Consider that we can take advantage of the current popularity of Pilates to bring people to our classes. And, in using TAGteach, we can provide the kind of positive and successful learning environment that will keep them there. Truly, everyone wins.

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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